This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.

+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.

+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.

+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

600072042L

MARGARET;

OR,

PREJUDICE AT HOME, AND ITS VICTIMS.

An Autobiography.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

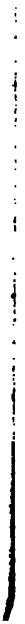
VOL. I.

LONDON:

RICHARD BENTLEY, NEW BURLINGTON STREET.

1853.

249. x. 92.



It is an emotion of selfishness in both cases; but I have lived long enough to know that selfishness is needful for self-preservation. It is, however, something above and beyond this comfortable assurance that by slow degrees has endowed me with courage to look the past boldly in the face. I know that many are perishing in the storm by which I was well-nigh wrecked, body and soul; I know, too, that their chance of escape can hardly fall short of what mine was; but, let the worst come to the worst, I have wrested from the strong grasp of earthly oppression a conviction that God will take care of his own.

I am a citizen of the world, and as such I lay claim to none of the patriotic feeling that inclines others to glory in the land of their birth. Indeed, it was made so clear to me years ago that I never ought to have been born at all, that I may well hesitate at writing myself down a denizen of any particular land; and as I commenced life without right to any name beyond the simple one prefixed to this book, it may be understood at once that I was the first of my race.

The accident of my birth occurred at ——, a cathedral city of England. I believe I was as wilful and wayward in my infancy and girlhood as any one could be about whose privilege to bring added trouble into this world there was no ques-

tion. I had my antipathies and partialities, which were, perhaps, the more decided because they were allowed small scope. Of the three persons with whom alone I held any intercourse until my fifteenth year, I loved and reverenced the first, feared the second, and thoroughly disliked the third.

The first of these was my grandfather, Thomas Marples. He was a verger of the cathedral, as his father had been before him. He was a venerable-looking old man, tall, thin, and slightly bent; his long white hair floated about a countenance that had been handsome, and that now beamed with intelligence and piety, and his singularly large eyes had a mournful expression, especially when they rested upon myself, that very early arrested my attention and drew me towards him, and, more than anything else, confirmed his influence over me. Those large melancholy eyes haunted my dreams. There was a mystery in them that I could not fathom in the days when it never occurred to me to ask any question about mysel and I was busied with it in my childish way till I could not get rid of the impression. I saw that there was some secret suffering, some hidden bleeding of the heart, thinly veiled from me beneath the uniform serenity and uncomplaining endurance of one who knew in whom he had trusted.

In this manner I first became acquainted with the admonitory heart-ache that, if only by way of variety, comes upon us even in childhood. And as the heart must be touched before the mind can be properly regulated, this latent interest in himself led me to listen more attentively to the pious instructions of my grandfather. His simple but earnest exposition of the great plan of redemption disclosed it to me in all its sublimity and beauty. Familiar with the histories of all civilized nations, he brought before me the examples of the noble and good who had apparently lived and died for the sole purpose of testing this great power of God to overcome the world; and, in the absence of all personal trial, there was an abundance of impatient energy in my spirit that led me to sympathise with those who had thus suffered and triumphed. It never struck me that the principles which I could follow so well in theory were reducible to practice; that I might show a little more becoming submission to my imperious Aunt Betsy, and endure with more patience the hard-tasking and stern manner of Uncle Stephen.

The latter did not reside with us. He was a bachelor; and I first remember him living in the High-street of the city, where he kept a silver-smith's and jeweller's shop. He afterwards gave up business and removed to a small house near

my grandfather's. He might have been as old as the latter, but he was more robust, and in personal appearance very different. He was short, rather stout, and slightly deformed; his head protruding abruptly from between shoulders more than usually prominent and rounded. His hair, of an iron-grey, curled closely about his head; his lips were thin, and he had a habit of compressing them that gave to the lower part of his face an unnatural expression; his eyes were small, black and piercing; and his countenance altogether had a strong, stern determination about it that struck me in those early days as indicating a tyrannical temper of mind, against which I was well inclined to rebel. It was he who sent to my grandfather's house the instrument—a pianoforte—upon which he gave me instructions in music. He commenced teaching me French before I was two years old, and, when I had become moderately proficient, he would not allow me to address him in any other language. In addition, he gave me a thorough English education, and I had a natural talent for drawing, which he fostered by providing me with all requisite materials, and the best models for copying. Four hours out of every day, morning and afternoon, he rigidly devoted to my instruction, and he generally left me more than sufficient work to fill up the rest of my time. What struck

me as disagreeable in Uncle Stephen was, that all this seemed a laborious task to him rather than a work of duty or pleasure. There was no familiarity between us; he never addressed me by any term of endearment, but came and went like the hard taskmaster he was. If I chanced to satisfy him, he would say, "That will do, but you must do better," and I knew that no better doing could draw us closer together as uncle and niece.

My Aunt Betsy was, perhaps, not quite so old as either of these two, though it would have been difficult to guess her age. Almost as tall as my grandfather, she was of more masculine make, gaunt, large-boned, and hard-featured. Whilst Uncle Stephen's manner always expressed stern resolution to go through with a task, hers always expressed impatience. I was never in the right place, never out of her way; always making work and doing none. And these complaints did not spring from any desire that I should help her; for Aunt Betsy was only in her element when working hard, and she could not in our small household find enough to do. I only made matters worse by offering my services; I was fit for nothing that she could understand, and had better hold my tongue. Yet this rough, hard woman had brought me up from my very birth, and I struggled with my repugnance, and tried to be-

lieve that in some yet undiscovered corner of her heart I held a better place than that outwardly assigned to me.

I believe I was by nature affectionate, and that it was not my fault that I lavished all my affection upon my grandfather. There was something genial and benignant about him that seemed to infect others, and when in his presence I always found Uncle Stephen and Aunt Betsy more gracious. He had this influence over them, and I soon found it out. Then his small collection of books constituted my sole recreation. I read to him or with him, and there was perfect sympathy between us. Our usual sitting-room was crowded with antique furniture that had belonged to my great-grandfather. Grotesquely carved chests and cabinets, and tables with a multitude of twisted legs, and arm-chairs of curious make, all polished bright as the incessant labour of Aunt Betsy could make them. Piled upon these cabinets, or stowed away in the chests, or scattered upon the tables, were worm-eaten editions of ancient works, both religious and profane. Amongst the latter were the old chroniclers, Stow and Camden, Leland and Holinshed; Defoe's History of the Plague, Walton's Angler, the works of Bacon, Locke, and Newton, and a fair show of the elder poets and dramatists. It was my chief delight

to pore over these works, and find a vent for my sympathies in them, and form from them some vague notion of the world from which I was so completely shut out. It did not strike me so forcibly as it might have done that my way of life was very odd; that I had never mixed with children or young people of my own age, and that we had no visitors. If I went out, I was accompanied by one of my three protectors; but as we had a large garden to walk in, I seldom did go out except to the cathedral service. When there I was too much engrossed by the assembled congregation; I fancied I could read people's characters in their faces, and I had conceived an especial reverence for one old lady who passed in and out, leaning on a gold-headed cane, and followed by a footman. She was very spare in figure, very erect and rigid; but her hands and head had a palsied movement. There was nothing prepossessing in her face, which was so shrunken, and wrinkled, and battered by time, that I fairly gave her credit for having once looked more amiable. She reminded me, however, of the devout and noble woman of whom I had read, and there was to me something particularly touching in the piety of the very aged; in the bowing of the feeble knees and the white head on the verge of eternity. On one occasion, whilst passing out of

the cathedral, she dropped her stick. I was close behind her, and I darted forward, picked up the stick, and presented it to her before the footman could interfere. I shall never forget the sudden look of absolute horror with which she drew herself up, and waved me back, and motioned her attendant to take the stick from me. I was sufficiently abashed before Aunt Betsy seized me by the arm, and gave me a gripe and a savage shake that almost made me cry out with pain.

This was my first attempt to interfere with the arrangements of the outer world, of which I knew so little. My conduct was reported to my grandfather, who gently admonished me to keep out of the way of Lady Leigh, who was very proud, for the future. I believe that first contact with the world roused all that was evil in my own nature. I had lived so entirely with old people that my sympathies followed the aged rather than the young, and my first emotion was one of intense pain at being thus scornfully repulsed by a person whom I was so well inclined to venerate. I had obeyed a blind instinct which prompted me to help the helpless, and I was told that this was wrong. I had been taught, above all things, to be courteous, and my first act of courtesy had drawn down wrath upon me from all sides. From Lady Leigh first, because she was proud. It was

because I was her inferior in some way, in every way, perhaps, that she had repulsed my attempt to render her a slight service. This set me thinking, for the first time, about my position in the world. I knew that it was humble, but I thought the days were past in which Christians, professing a creed that inculcates humility, and honours poverty, trampled upon their brethren and stamped disgrace upon an inevitable lot. I had heard so much from my grandfather about the glorious effects produced by the Reformation, that I felt sure this must be one of them. Indeed, I was simple enough to believe it must be the principal one; and he was accustomed to speak so enthusiastically about the rapid progress of true Christianity in the world, that I was fully prepared to be greeted by open hearts and arms whenever I entered it. The case of this Lady Leigh must be a peculiar one, or there must be something very wrong about myself. Who was I, after all? I had been taken to see my mother's gravestone, which simply bore the name of "Alice," inscribed under that of my grandmother. I must have had a father, and who and what was he? I had frequently questioned my grandfather and Aunt Betsy about him, but they evaded my inquiry, and I had allowed it to drop; for I noticed that the mention of either of my parents occa-

sioned them great pain, which I attributed to grief for their loss. Now, however, it struck me that there must be some other motive for this silence. Mere sorrow for the dead would inevitably yield to time: it seemed more probable that some disgrace connected with the past weighed on the spirit of my grandfather, and prompted the secrecy which was becoming oppressive to me, and compelled us to live in the seclusion that I saw was peculiar to ourselves.

I was astonished that this thought had never occurred to me before, and the feelings it called forth mastered me completely. I was not naturally so tame and docile as I had appeared to be, and my spirit rose up to resist what I considered a wrong and an oppression. It had been no mercy to me to keep me in ignorance of my true position, to allow me to go forth into the world and then learn that the crimes of others had rendered me an outcast. I was indignant alike with those who had thus reared me and with the world, above whose injustice I was determined to rise.

But I did not speak out at once; I underwent a terrible conflict before I could summon courage to look the worst in the face. I had been reared with high notions of honour; I had all that reverence of worth for worth's sake that compels the

spirit to shrink from every appearance of evil; and I felt that death itself was preferable to the degredation into which I was about to fall. I tormented myself day and night with all manner of conjectures. I knew that my mother was a mere girl when she died; perhaps hurried to an early grave by the vicious courses of her husband. My suspicions could only fix upon him. Perhaps he had been a murderer, and had suffered the penalty of his crime. I uttered a loud cry of horror at the thought, and flung my hands out wildly with a sense of loathing for the blood that flowed in them and curdled about my heart. It seemed probable, however, that his crime was of lesser magnitude, and that he was still living. I had never been told that he was dead; I had taken it for granted when I was informed that I had no father. When I asked to see his grave, and they said it was not there, I was satisfied. The fact was, that my deep love and reverence for my grandfather, his own earnest truthfulness, and benignity, and piety, had satisfied me altogether, so that I reposed in an atmosphere of peacefulness and affection to which no breath of distrust might come. He had, too, taught me to forget myself in others, and to find a full life in the undying presence of the great and good of all ages, so that this sudden concentration of

all thought and feeling in my individual destiny seemed to change my very nature.

I, too, had a career to run, and this thought also occurred to me for the first time,—my protectors were all old people who might soon be taken away. What was to become of me? I had been told that I must earn my own bread, but how was I to be introduced to the world with this load of ignominy upon me? How was I to endure the natural repugnance of the noble and the good? How, above all, was I to bear this weight upon my own heart through a long life?

I felt that my grandfather had miscalculated upon the resignation to the will of Providence which he had urged upon me so continually. To content myself with a life of shame seemed against the spirit of all I had been taught; and, especially in these days to which had descended the doctrine of Christ in all its purity, I felt that it would be terrible to be so branded in the midst of the pure and the godly who were already peopling the whole earth. I wished to bury myself from the eyes of an immaculate world in which my very presence would be an offence.

This was the idea I had formed of the world, and I felt that it was the terrible wickedness of my own heart that inclined me to rebel against

its decrees. I did not imagine that it would altogether use me ill, but that I should be oppressed by its compassion, tortured by its tolerance. My own horror of everything sinful or dishonourable helped me to conceive this of others. My opinion of Lady Leigh's piety was exalted by the very conduct that inspired me with a fearful sort of hatred. I had given her no time for reflection, and it was the natural instinct of a godly spirit and a pure heart.

The great horror of my cogitations was, that I could not help regarding the rebellious murmurings of my heart as a proof that I had more of the evil of my progenitor in my nature than I should find convenient in a world from which evil of all kinds was disappearing very fast. Destiny seemed about to drive me the wrong way, in spite of all my cleaving to the good, the beautiful, and the holy.

It will be percieved that I considered myself a person of some importance. Was I not a member of the great Christian family which one day I should have to enter bodily? I could not conceive the possibility of being altogether overlooked by those whose care extended to the heathen and the savage, who hailed the elsewhere proscribed slave by the name of brother, and, as it were, extended their arms to the outcast and

the benighted of all lands. Already gathered into this fold, it was important that I should prove myself worthy of the high privileges that awaited me.

I was suspended betwixt this heaven and my own earthiness. If there were anything in the way to be resisted, I had an instinctive fear that the old nature would be uppermost,—that I should find a pleasure in resisting. It was a strange satisfaction to me then to rouse out of my usual quiescent state, and battle with imaginary wrongs and difficulties. If I believed this to be a device of the great enemy of souls, I felt little inclination to attempt its overthrow by doing battle with him.

I continued in this agitated state for more than a week, undecided what I should say, or to whom I should speak first; I thought that, being no longer a child—for I was nearly fifteen —I had a right to know such particulars of the past as concerned me, and I was resolved not to rest till I had obtained this knowledge. I still shrank from the idea of wounding my grandfather by my importunity, and Aunt Betsy had a decided way of putting me down that left me small hope of getting any information out of her. I resolved to question Uncle Stephen, as the one most likely to take a common-sense view of the

matter, and the least likely to feel pained by any calling back of the past. Having formed this resolve, I put it into execution the next time we were alone.

"Uncle Stephen," I said, "I wish to ask you a few questions. Don't you think I am old enough to know a little more about myself?"

"About yourself?" said my uncle, gruffly. "I thought you had been pretty well enlightened by your grandfather on that subject. Has he not taught you to understand that you are a weak, helpless creature—setting aside your strong tendency towards wickedness? Have you a craving appetite that way? Do you want to hear anything worse?"

"You do not comprehend me," I said, disconcerted by his manner; "I wish to learn something more of my family—of my father, for instance. Now, uncle, is he dead?"

"As a good Christian you are bound to believe that he is living; in any case, don't trouble your head about him."

"But I *must* trouble myself about him. I do not even know his name. If his memory is a disgrace to you, it is more to me. I am his child; and no one has a right to keep me in this ignorance."

"Hey-day! this is to be a strong demonstra-

tion, is it? Hark you!" he continued, grasping my arm; "whatever you do, don't fall into a fit of heroics about your father; he is not worth it. Suppose *I* was your father! would you think I had been a very kind one, eh?"

I could not say I should. I should have expected in a parent, even more of the affectionate interest, and pleasure, and pride, that my grandfather had always shown in me. I remained silent.

"You would not, I see," he continued. "Yet there are worse fathers in the world, Margaret. The fact is, that according to your ideas of parental excellence, you never had a father. Of course there is, or was, an individual to whom you owe the boon of existence, and at the proper time you shall know all about him. Will that satisfy you?"

"No," I said, passionately, "it will not. You know I am old enough to understand that something dreadful is concealed under this mystery; that I am capable of feeling keenly whatever disgrace is in store for me; that it is a hard task to wait patiently where one has everything to fear, and nothing to hope. I cannot thank you for what you have done for me whilst you leave me in this defenceless state, open to the censure

of the world to an extent that I may not comprehend. One thing I am determined about—I will not again quit this house until I know what it is that may make others shrink away from me, as Lady Leigh did the other day.

My uncle fairly started. "Now you puzzle me," he said. "And you really have retained that circumstance, and set about calculating your chances in life? Why, you intuitively worldly little person, where did you learn all this?"

He spoke in a light, mocking tone that irritated me. It seemed cruel to trifle with me in such a matter, and I turned away with proud, angry tears in my eyes.

"Come, come," he said, passing his arm round my neck, and drawing my averted face towards him; "what you ask is quite right, Margaret, and if it had rested with me alone you should have known everything long ago. As to the world—go out into it, and lift your head up in it, and be as proud and independent as you like—there is nothing to bring shame upon *you*. But we must do nothing without your grandfather's knowledge, Margaret; I will speak to him; and at any rate you shall know all in a few days."

He kissed my forehead as he spoke. Uncle Stephen had never exhibited so much kind feel-

ing before, and coming upon me then in my extremity, I seemed overwhelmed by it. I sat at the table and wept.

"My poor child!" he said, bending over me. "If you had been left more to my care, this would not have been. But it is not too late, and I am thankful to see that you have common sense. I can deal with *that*. Trust to Uncle Stephen, and keep quiet."

I cannot say that I kept very quiet, but in some way Uncle Stephen had reassured me. I might enter the world, as I wished, with my head erect, not bowed down by an involuntary humility; and my chief terror being taken away, the excitement that was still upon me was comparatively painless.

Aunt Betsy, who kept good hours, always saw me safe in bed and took my light away. On the night following my interview with Uncle Stephen, I felt too restless for sleep, so I got up and dressed myself. I knew that my grandfather always sat up late, and I was inclined to join him. I knew that I could presume so far on his indulgence; but Aunt Betsy's room was between us. I listened at the door, and found from her regular breathing that she slept; and then, with my shoes off, I passed through softly, down to my own room. It was called mine, because my piano and

all my school-books were there, and I had always pursued my studies in it. It was divided from the sitting-room by a thin wooden partition, the two having originally been one room; and the light streaming through the chinks of the door assured me that my grandfather was up. I was stooping to put my shoes on, when the outer door opened, and some one entered. I soon discovered that it was Uncle Stephen, though no one spoke. I saw his shadow moving about. I knew his step; and presently I heard him draw a chair to the fire and sit down.

There was a strong temptation upon me to stop and listen to their conversation. I thought it very likely that something would be concealed from me in any revelation that might be made, and I tried to persuade myself that it would be right to arrive at the truth by any means. I was not hard to persuade, though I lingered with a burning blush upon my face, feeling that I was doing wrong. I trembled so that I was compelled to lean against a chair, and in the deep silence I could hear the beating of my heart. Several minutes elapsed, and then I heard Uncle Stephen speak as plainly as if I had been in the room.

"You have a more than ordinarily spectral look about you to-night, Thomas Marples," he

said, "I wish you would try to be as like a mortal as possible, in order to accommodate yourself to my poor clay, for I feel altogether out of sorts."

"What is the matter?" asked my grandfather.

"The matter! nothing is the matter with *me*. I should be right enough, if it was not for other people. It is you that I expect will be all wrong by-and-by, and then, of course, I must suffer."

"If there is any new sorrow in store for me let me know it," said my grandfather; "I am prepared."

"There! how I do hate the stoicism of Christians; the pertinacious putting-on of the crown of thorns! Why don't you rip out and say, 'What the devil's the matter now!' then there would be some hope of you."

"Ours is a strange companionship," said my grandfather; "I have been musing about it to-night."

"Not stranger than most of the companionships of this world," said Uncle Stephen, "and far more honest. Look at the thousands who, professing the same belief, do not expect from one another any of the fruits of it; men of the world who patronize religion and hold it up to contempt at the same time; who knowingly enact a daily lie, professing themselves to be members of a

church that insists upon humility, and pronounces a curse upon covetousness, yet with all the might that is in them scrambling for precedence and wealth, reckless whom they trample down, or in what company they rise. We at least have a disinterested respect for one another; we represent the two extremes of belief and unbelief, and we marvel alike at the inconsistencies around us. We do not spare one another either, and our out-spoken differences help to bind us together. Is it not so?"

"It has been so to a certain extent; we at least know how far we can trust one another. There is a point at which we stop, and there distrust begins, and sometimes we marvel how we came to be united so closely."

"That is, you do: I never marvel at anything. You speak with your wonted sincerity, Thomas, and I like you for it. Your old fear of me is coming back tenfold. I am glad of it: I want a hold upon you somewhere. You are going too far on the wrong road, and there is no one beside myself to arrest your progress. Now you are older than I am, and I number fifty-seven years: how much longer do you propose to live?"

"I have entered upon the last term of years allotted to man, and may not reckon upon a single day."

"And you feel easy about leaving yonder child to the tender mercies of this world?"

There was a pause: my grandfather did not speak, and Uncle Stephen resumed.

"You do *not*: that is right. A clever world it is in many respects—full of science, and philosophy, and steam—full of religion, too, and philanthropy on an imposing scale; but, somehow, there is a dearth of the small change of humanity, that makes it a barren place to the ordinary strugglers for bread. You know no more of this world as it really is than a child—you that pretend to teach others. An old-fashioned dread of evil has prevented your doing any good: your only struggle has been after resignation—contentment with things as they are—the most fatal of all errors."

"To what purpose would you have me rebel?" said my grandfather. "Sorrow enough, wrong enough, I have had, God knows; if I can still bide His time, why should I trouble myself more and more?"

"You speak as if you had only yourself to think about. Your panacea for all earthly evils, like our modern pills, won't suit all constitutions. Content yourself as much as you like with sorrow and wrong, but allow others to resist both, if they like—and can. Confound it, what an odd doctrine

you have been preaching all your life! Fancy a nation glorying in its poverty, boasting of its weakness, parading the contempt in which it lies as a special mark of God's favour! To this state Christianity would have brought us, if in all times there had not been men wise enough to see the folly of conforming to its doctrines. The madness is not less when individuals bring themselves or others to this state. This is a sin upon which the world sits in judgment."

"To what purpose is this exhibition of the cloven foot to-night, Stephen? Why, before the world, do you still profess to honour Christianity?"

"Because I would not bring upon myself the rabid wrath of pretenders; because I like to convict them in their pretension. I gave some of them a few hits to-night at the club, when the health of the new mayor was drank. I did not empty my glass, but proposed an amendment of the toast, and drained the dregs in honour of his private character as a good brother, &c."

"Oh, Stephen, you should not have done that?"

"They hate me for it, and would kick me out if they did not believe me to be rich. I like to see them writhe and fawn at the same time, and know how little reason they have to do either."

"You make me shudder. Such a life in the

world, and no life in God! I was hoping, too, that through my humble means He would touch your heart. You disappoint me, grievously, Stephen."

"You have done your best to convert me: let that reflection console you. You cannot say that I have not been a patient listener. Have I ever deceived you in anything?"

"No, Stephen, you have kept good faith with me. You were a kind friend when others turned away from me in my trouble, or remained only to make it more bitter."

"I will be fair and open with you to the end. I came to speak with you about Margaret. It is one of your fallacies to suppose that she is quite happy."

"What sorrow is there to disturb my child?"

"What is the power you suppose yourself to possess over the mind that you have tried to prepare for anything but the battle of life?" said Uncle Stephen. "Child! she never was a child; her whole brief life has been marked by earnest purpose and passionate thought; her mind is vigorous and active, and you might as well try to bind the surges of the sea as check the free flow of its thoughts. This fair page, which you are so fearful of soiling, cannot remain a blank. With

what is it to be filled up—with the truth, bad as it is, or with lies for ever?"

"I have taught her nothing save the truth," said my grandfather.

"Her whole life has been a cheat, and no one knows it better than yourself. You have taught her to believe that the world is full of truth, and goodness, and mercy; and she will have to be rudely awakened from a life-dream. Think of her reverence for those who regard her as an unclean thing—who would not touch her with the hem of their garments! Could she conceive from anything you have taught her, that the cold, thin blood flowing in Lady Leigh's shrivelled veins would boil up with indignation if she approached her even as a fellow Christian? Yet this woman is zealous about missions, and professes to have a tender care for black souls. Pooh! what humbug it is!"

"I thought you had some news for me," said my grandfather, after a pause.

"It is this: yesterday Margaret again questioned me about her father. I can put off her inquiries no longer, and I have promised that in a few days I will tell her all."

"You shall not!"

"I will! The fact is, she *must* enter the

world; must know it as it is. Why not start her fairly and honestly?"

"With some of your cold, cheerless philosophy, I suppose; making a darker wilderness of this world, and a blank of the next."

"Nay," said Uncle Stephen, "I promised years ago that I would not interfere with her religious belief. I never promised to keep her in the dark about actual facts. You are aware, I suppose, that Colonel Leigh has arrived, and is now at his mother's house. The mayor and corporation talk of inviting him to a public dinner in honour of his glorious campaign in India. On Sunday, his uncle, the Dean, preaches, and you may expect to see him at the morning service with all his honours thick upon him. Up and down the town men are vieing with each other as to the best method of paying him respect."

"All this is nothing to me," said my grandfather.

"We have made a fair start of forbidden subjects," continued Uncle Stephen, "and the very necessity of things must drive us on. It has often struck me as odd, that Christians, even such as you are, seem to think less of the backslidings of their brethren than unbelievers like myself can do. It is a marvel to me how yonder Dean can receive this man, his nephew, with open arms and

evident exultation as he does; how he can mount the pulpit and preach what he professes to be the word of God before him, and never for an instant think of admonishing him on neglected moral duties; never even himself recognising their existence. Now, if I were a Christian, I could not sit to hear that man preach; I should have the mocking laughter of devils in my ears. As it is, I mark and inwardly digest, after a fashion that would astonish some of your high churchmen. I should like to put to Colonel Leigh the question I have put to you sometimes—what is to become of this child?"

"Stephen Leath," said my grandfather, "I must desire you to leave Margaret in my hands. What it is necessary for her to know I will tell her myself, but not until this man has left the place, which he soon will do. The Lord help me, for my way is dark and I have only His light to guide me!"

"I wish you would be guided by the light of reason and common sense," said Uncle Stephen. "Well, I know it is of no use talking to you. As to Margaret, she has my promise, as I told you. I consider it a duty to let her know all the truth."

"This must be done under the Lord's guidance," said my grandfather; "you must leave her to me."

"She is not to be put off much longer," said Uncle Stephen. "We shall see."

I heard him put on his greatcoat and walk out without saying another word: and then the tremulous voice of my grandfather arose in earnest prayer.

CHAPTER II.

It was a very bleak night in the depth of winter, and I had been standing in the cold and the darkness; but it was rather an inward chill, striking to my very heart, that made me feel as if my blood had turned to ice when I attempted to move. I had learned from the preceding conversation that Uncle Stephen was not a Christian, and the knowledge seemed to freeze me with horror. It was dreadful, too, to hear him bring accusations against Christians, which my grandfather seemed incapable of answering. Then, in some way, and in spite of myself, my sympathies seemed to go with Uncle Stephen. There was an openness about all he said that commanded respect; he evidently had my interest at heart; and from him alone there seemed a chance of my learning all the truth. Then this Colonel and Lady Leigh seemed in

some way connected with my early history. It was possible that, through my parents, I had received some wrong at their hands, and, if so, I felt well inclined with Uncle Stephen to resist them.

The low, earnest tones of my grandfather's voice were still sounding in my ears when I crept back to my own chamber. I had taken a candle with me, and I tried to recollect and write down the conversation I had heard. It was altogether painful and bewildering; and, after all, what I could not help considering the lost state of my uncle was uppermost in my mind. I felt that I must be careful about receiving impressions from one who could only be a blind leader of the blind, the more so as the natural corruption of my own heart seemed likely to incline me to error. I was quite conscious of being deficient in the humility and strong faith that made my grandfather patient under wrong and affliction; but I was earnest in my wish to lead a life of righteousness in Christ, even because no worthy ambition, no noble purpose could be pursued out of it.

I fell asleep at length, oppressed by this chaos of thought, and Aunt Betsy aroused me early with a rebuke for my idleness. My grandfather had gone out, and we breakfasted together. It was

easy to see that Aunt Betsy had got something on her mind. She was unusually silent, and I caught her looking at me several times in a strange way. She surprised me at length by passing her fingers through my hair, which curled naturally.

"You don't take proper pains with your hair," she said. "Whilst you were a child, I used to wash it every morning, and just pass it round my fingers, and it curled beautifully. To-morrow morning I will do it myself again." This notice of my hair was the more surprising, because Aunt Betsy had frequently told me I spent too much time about it, admonishing me not to think too much of my personal appearance.

"I bought a new ribbon for your best bonnet yesterday," she continued, "for the one you wore all last winter is growing shabby. Fetch the bonnet down stairs, and let me see you trim it nicely."

Aunt Betsy had been a dressmaker in her young days, and she had taught me to make everything for her and myself. I fetched the bonnet, a brown straw one, stripped off the old trimming, and commenced adorning it with the very pretty brown-and-amber ribbon that my aunt produced. I had some difficulty to please her with my taste. She wanted it to look as becoming as possible,—another singularity that I was unable

to account for. When I had at length finished, and put the bonnet on, she turned me round admiringly.

"You need not be ashamed to show your face," she said, tossing her head as she motioned me towards the looking-glass. "You are none the worse for being a Marples. Your mother and grandmother were both handsome, and you are like your grandfather. I don't see that you owe your good looks to anybody else."

This strange outburst of feeling on the part of Aunt Betsy led me to survey myself more intently than I had ever done before. I was tall for my age, and rather stoutly built. I was certainly like my grandfather. I had the same broad forehead and large brown eyes, looking darker because of the long, black lashes that overshadowed them. My face was oval, my nose straight, my mouth small, with lips delicately chiselled, and terminating in a round chin. My complexion was fair and clear, with a heightened colour, and heavy masses of curling brown hair formed a sort of framework to a not unflattering picture. As I stood gazing, the red blood mounted to my forehead, and I turned away with a sudden sense of shame and annoyance at having so readily been betrayed into an absurd admiration of myself.

"You always told me, Aunt Betsy," I said, "that good looks were only skin-deep."

"And that is true," said Aunt Betsey, "of the beauty that young girls only think about. There is something beyond that that proud people seek to keep to themselves. Never mind. To-morrow you shall wear your brown merino dress and mantle; and I wish you would give up that foolish way you have of looking so humble before strange people. Hold your head a little higher, if you wish that others should think well of you. If you help the world to beat you down, you may keep down."

This was so unlike what I had ever heard from Aunt Betsy, and so like what Uncle Stephen had said, that I was more and more bewildered. This new doctrine suited me very well, but the ready adaptation alarmed my conscience. The mild teachings of my grandfather, strengthened by his example during so many years, had taken less hold of me than did this more congenial law of liberty in a few hours. Taught by him to distrust my own heart above all things, I could not help thinking that there was something wrong about my new advisers and myself also.

On this day when my grandfather came home to dinner, he told my aunt that he wished her

and myself to attend St. Mary's Church on the following morning instead of the cathedral, where we usually went. Without replying, Aunt Betsy contrived to express a very decided objection to this plan; she sat fuming and tossing her head; and when my grandfather went out he thought it necessary to say, "I expect to be obeyed in this matter."

I continued groping in the dark, troubling myself with profitless speculations. Had the Colonel Leigh of whom I heard Uncle Stephen speak, anything to do with this prohibition? I could only conclude that he had, and having seen thus far into the mystery, I could scarcely control the strong excitement that urged me to seek further.

I did not see Uncle Stephen that day, and I passed the evening as usual with my grandfather in scriptural reading and prayer. I felt like a culprit when he placed his hand on my head and blessed me, and crept to bed bewildered by my feverish thoughts about the world.

I did not sleep, but lay imagining all kinds of things, never coming near the truth. In the morning Aunt Betsy dressed my hair as she had promised, and altogether spent so much time about decorating me that I expressed a fear lest we should be too late for church.

"It is too late already," said Aunt Betsy; "we are not going to church this morning."

"Not going to church after all that trouble!"

I seated myself at the window and took up a book, but I did not see a word in it. The impatience that had been gathering in my spirit boiled up at so slight an annoyance as this. Scarcely acknowledged to myself there had been an idea in my mind that this day would be an important one; I thought that Aunt Betsy had not taken such pains about my personal appearance for nothing; I knew that her thoughts had been unusually occupied; that she had seemed determined to take her own wilful course in some matter, and I had drawn a hope from these circumstances, that now failed me. Nothing is easier than to teach forbearance to those who have no immediate use for it. From the first moment that I felt myself aggrieved I had restrained my feelings only by a strong effort, and it would have been difficult to persuade me that the meek endurance which I had admired in others was applicable to my own case. Alas! for my poor grandfather! he had sown the good seed amongst thorns, and the trouble of this world was about to choke it!

As I occasionally glanced at Aunt Betsy, sitting so quietly with her bible before her, it irritated

me further to see that all traces of discomposure had vanished from her countenance, that she had relapsed altogether into her usual frigidity of manner. I believe my dislike to Aunt Betsy originated in this power of hers to sit for hours together noticing no one, and apparently caring for nothing, and looking so stern and determined about it, that one could not muster courage to address her. It was a relief to see her actively employed about household matters; for then she found a voice, if only to notice faults and correct them. There was a restless energy about myself that rendered this mood of hers particularly oppressive when we sat at work together. I could bear with my grandfather in his frequent fits of meditation: I knew that he was communing with his God, and the thought inspired me with reverential respect, if I did not sympathize with him to the extent that I imagined I did. But what in the world was it that so pre-occupied Aunt Betsy, or did she ever think at all? She was not eminent for piety; she never took up a book except the Bible once a week, and she was in the habit of thanking God that, having never married, she had brought no trouble into the world. This was her manner of informing me that *I* was a trouble. I could not suppose that it was of a nature to burden the mind in her case; and with

regard to the additional drudgery that my presence in the world occasioned her, I tried to lighten it as much as I could. I thought of all these circumstances as I gazed at her furtively from time to time. She was evidently what is called a strong-minded woman. There was no nonsense, no weakness, about her. If she had been gentle and tender-hearted, I should have wondered whether what I considered her very amazing ugliness had not occasioned her much sorrow and disappointment in the course of her past life. As it was, it was evident that she did not think the less of herself on this account, rather taking a pride in making the worst of what was bad enough; adhering to a most ungainly bygone fashion in dress, especially caps and bonnets. The one good feature in her character, over and above her housewifely thrift and activity, was sincerity. She would let you know at once that you must expect nothing further or better from her than you found. There was no weak point about her to be taken advantage of for good or evil; her qualities of heart and mind bristled out like the quills of a porcupine, and you only fared the worse by seeking further. I as a child found all this out, and I had no particular admiration of the good faith that I could only wish might be broken.

Such as she was, Aunt Betsy was the only female of whom I had any personal knowledge, and I had a pleasure in contrasting her, so far as my opportunities offered, with others. At church and in the streets I encountered many matronly women with kind and smiling faces; many young girls whose countenances expressed joyousness or an inward complacency to which I was a stranger. I had only just begun to wonder why I was shut out from the free communion allowed to others, when the shadow of a terrible doubt fell upon me; and this doubt gave birth to the vague hope and the subsequent disappointment under which I sat chafing in my aunt's presence.

The clock was on the stroke of twelve, and neither of us had moved. In a fit of uncontrolable impatience I threw the book I held from me, rose up and looked out upon the garden.

"What is the matter now?" said my Aunt; "Are you tired of well-doing?"

If the well-doing had consisted in poring over the book, it was a misnomer, as I had not seen a word in it. I am sure I had never before set Aunt Betsy's authority at nought as I did then by not answering her.

"You think yourself very ill used, I dare say," she continued. "We must get you out into the world, and then you will see. You may put your

bonnet and mantle on now; I want you to go out with me."

I did not obey her so readily as I should have done a few hours earlier. My very vapoury hope had evaporated; disappointment had wearied me; and an inactivity of mind succeeded, during which I felt little interest in anything. In this mood, after dressing myself, I rejoined my aunt.

She surveyed me attentively from head to foot, seemed satisfied, and, desiring me to follow her, walked out, locking the door behind her. As we walked up the long lane that led into the cathedral-yard my interest revived. I might well wonder whither we were bound, considering that we had no acquaintances, and that the Morning Service at church was nearly over. We met no one; but on approaching the cathedral we saw several carriages waiting for their respective owners. Aunt Betsy walked round to the western front, and paced backwards and forwards, frequently looking up at the clock; suddenly she seized my arm and dragged me towards the usual entrance. She ascended the steps and stationed herself by the door, still holding me fast. One of the carriages had drawn up, and in the footman who stood at the open door of it, I recognised the man who usually attended Lady Leigh. My heart was already

beating rapidly when Aunt Betsy said, in a deep whisper, "Would you like to see your father?" I had only just turned and fixed my eyes upon her when she stretched out her arm and said aloud, "That is your father!"

The personage at whom she pointed was a tall, handsome, military-looking man, of middle age, who was just approaching from the interior with Lady Leigh hanging upon his arm. I saw *her*, though I saw nothing else save him. I sprang forward and stood before them, so that I impeded their progress. I stood, doubtless, in a very theatrical attitude; with clasped hands, and eyes expressing all the deep interest of my heart and soul. I heard Lady Leigh utter a shrill scream; whether she fell, or was carried away by some one, or walked away of her own accord, I never knew, but I did know that the tall man and myself stood alone for the space of a few seconds, face to face, and that, as I gazed, a dark frown gathered on his countenance. Then some one drew me away, and I heard the voice of my grandfather.

He led me into the interior and down one of the aisles. I scarcely felt his grasp upon my arm, or my own footfalls; I was as one in a wild dream. Yet I had a perception of the truth, and the blood, that had just been chilled by emotion,

burned on my cheeks and seemed to scorch my heart.

"How have you been led into this folly?" said my grandfather. "You have not dealt fairly with me, Margaret."

I was about to reply impatiently, but checked myself. Amid all the tumult of my feelings I was enabled to take a common-sense view of the matter, and I had a strong will to do right when what was right became clear to me. "Cling to them that cling to you," says Dr. Johnson, and I had at the moment a full consciousness of the wisdom of his words. My heart turned more than ever to this kind and pious old man, who had nurtured me so tenderly, though my very existence had probably constituted the sole disgrace of his own blameless life. Understanding in what true nobleness consisted, I was repelled at once and for ever by those who, if I had any claim upon them, seemed determined to disregard it and me.

"Do not be angry, dear grandfather," I said; "and do not fear me. I must have come to this knowledge some day, and it is better to know at once in what and whom I have to trust. I belong to you, and for the future you shall guide me entirely."

"God bless thee, my poor child!" he said, in

a hurried, broken voice; "wait here until all the people are gone, and then we will walk home."

He left me, and I paced up and down the solitary aisle. I found fresh matter for reflection in what he had said. Were Lady Leigh and her son quite free from blame, that they could thus walk boldly forth in the crowd; and what was the particular ignominy that compelled us to shrink from the gaze of our fellow mortals? I had a good deal to learn, and I was ready enough for the tempter when Uncle Stephen came up and tapped me on the shoulder.

"You are getting on," he said, "and presently you will understand this game of life. Do you yet comprehend what it is that is worshipped in this Christian temple?"

"Men profess to worship God in it," I replied.

"Right," he said, "that is what they profess, and nothing is easier than profession. You might have had a good illustration of their practices at the door just now, where the congregation stood bowing and smirking before the Dean and his nephew, the gallant Colonel Leigh. Men worship things essentially earthly, Margaret; money, position, fame,—nothing else. I wish you to understand the true value of this world's sympathy."

"You are speaking of a few," I said; "there are Christians in the world,—my grandfather is one of them."

"The only one I ever met with," said Uncle Stephen; "and what has he gained by it?—sorrow, and wrong, and contempt. Is it possible that you have never rightly understood the doctrine preached to you in these very walls—that there is a necessary connection between moral and material well-being? Yonder Dean, or Archdeacon Dixon, will demonstrate to you the utter impossibility of poverty being combined with worth; and this doctrine has gone the length and breadth of the land, and is obliterating all traces of a creed obsolete except in its name. You have some sense about you, Margaret; you shall hear the story of your birth, and judge for yourself; you shall go out into the world, and tell me what you find amongst this Christian people."

"*You* are not a Christian, Uncle Stephen," I said.

"And, therefore, you think I am prejudiced? How do you know I am not a Christian? Have you just discovered the fact, or did you surmise it years ago from my actions?"

"Nay, Uncle Stephen, you have always acted like a Christian towards me; I never understood

so well as I do at this moment, how much I owe to you."

"Never trouble your head about names," said Uncle Stephen; "you will find enough to trouble you in this hard world. Never inquire into motives; if you meet with reasonable treatment from any human being, be thankful, and inquire no further. Beware of the vision of Christian communion that your grandfather has placed before you: there is no such thing in life, as experience will shortly teach you. If you would not be altogether despised and crushed down, respect yourself,—struggle for yourself. Put all prejudices aside; resist evil in every shape;—you have the stuff in you;—be determined to rise, and then I shall feel that I have not bestowed my pains in vain."

This was the last doctrine I listened to in that temple of God which I never entered again. Uncle Stephen left me as he spoke, and when my grandfather came we walked home together. Neither of us spoke by the way, and when we arrived, we found Aunt Betsy busy as usual, and looking as if nothing had happened. Dinner passed over in silence, and it was not until we were all seated quietly together that my grandfather spoke.

"You have acted unadvisedly, Betsy Marples,"

he said; "but what is done cannot be undone. We now owe to this child an explanation of the past."

"I would do it again if it was to be done," said Aunt Betsy, in her determined manner. "It was right that the child should see her father; if they meet in the world now, they will know one another."

There was no further contention. I learned from both of them, and subsequently from Uncle Stephen, the particulars which I here give in the form of a detached narrative.

David Marples, the newly-elected mayor of ————, was an important man in his native city. By a remarkable talent for pushing and driving in the world, he had acquired great wealth, and along with it much respectful consideration from those about him. The son of a verger of the cathedral, he had received his education at the parish school, from which he was transferred to a warehouse as errand-boy. Rising by degrees, and shifting for himself, he at length set up as auctioneer, for which calling a certain amount of assurance and general knowledge of business matters seemed peculiarly to fit him. Entering into various speculations, he occasioned men to marvel at the rapidity and ease with

which he acquired wealth, which finally flowed down upon him in a deluge, that went nigh to obliterate every trace of his obscure origin. Having himself an eye to this desideratum in whatever he did, David, rather late in life, united himself to the daughter of a rich Liverpool merchant, and thereafter flourished in full blown dignity at his handsome mansion within half a mile of the city.

Applause so naturally follows success of any legitimate kind, that it is no wonder David rose high in the consideration of his fellow citizens. It is a noble sight to see a poor man striving after independence; many instinctive yearnings go with him in a career that promises to take him out of all possibility of becoming a burden upon the community, and to open before him a large sphere of usefulness to others. But for one man who, taking this view of the case would feel humbled and disappointed to see such acquisition of wealth and power used only for the indulgence of selfish and animal ends, and the fostering of vulgar pretension, there are thousands ready to pay court on any terms to men so favoured by fortune as David Marples.

It had suited Mr. Marples to forget, for the last twenty years, that he had a brother much older than himself; and the community had

favoured Mr. Marples by forgetting the fact to a great extent also. Indeed, nothing is so easy as to put poverty in the back-ground, especially in this free country; and the quiet, unobtrusive character of Thomas Marples had helped to bring about this state of affairs. Altogether unfitted for enterprise, being of a retired and studious disposition, he had readily yielded to the guidance of others in the matter of worldly occupation; and when, at a suitable age, his father found him a place as clerk in a lawyer's office, he offered no remonstrance, though the dry copying of legal documents was a monotonous task for one whose mind was peculiarly active, with regard to certain pursuits that would have been well enough for one who had no need to earn his own bread. Thomas Marples had about him every mark of a man destined to a life of obscurity. He was singularly pious, after the old-fashioned manner that makes a man patient and long-suffering; being too deeply impressed with his own shortcomings to take invidious notice of the failings of others. This disposition had been fostered in his early years. His mother, though an ignorant, had been an eminently pious woman, who laboured earnestly for the spiritual advancement of her children; and being possessed of a fine voice and some musical knowledge, he was early

admitted into the cathedral choir. Fond of antique research, especially as connected with ecclesiastical history, the old cathedral itself was a rich mine of wealth to him. He loved to linger amid the spacious aisles, communing with times long past, and only exulting in the present because he believed on them had dawned a purer faith, to whose ultimate results in regenerating the whole earth he looked confidently. Taking his stand on God's word, no falling-short of that high standard of Christian life in church or laymen could shake his faith, though he saw enough to impart a sad tone to a mind otherwise inclined to be uniformly though sedately cheerful. This peculiar disposition, inclining him to a reserve that had nothing of moroseness in it, made him very unpopular with those of his own age who were incapable of appreciating, or even understanding his character. What little intercourse he held with them, confirmed this ill opinion. His meekness was construed as meanness: his horror of actual sin was a species of cant that was unendurable: and save that home-example bore him up, Thomas Marples had no outward encouragement to persevere in a course that threatened to mar all his prospects in a worldly sense.

Nevertheless, he led an active life in his own

way. Everywhere scattered about this hard world, lie souls perishing through sheer dearth of spiritual help; hearts pining away through want of true sympathy; and amidst the very poor of his native city was opened to the eccentric young man a wide sphere of usefulness. Sorrow, and sickness, and death, threw aside many a door to him, through which he entered, bearing with him the light of Christ, and never failing to dissipate somewhat of the dense darkness he usually found there. For though religion was considered to be the staple commodity of the old ecclesiastical city of ——, infidelity and utter spiritual darkness had their strongholds in many an odd nook and corner, to say nothing of the more general spiritual indifference which seemed to stand in no awe of the legitimate upholders of a good which is not of this world.

And from amidst the very poor Thomas Marples selected as his wife a young woman, whose whole family had been suddenly swept away by a virulent fever, that during several weeks had kept the bells of the churches tolling. If theirs was not an ordinary courtship, it was one that bade fair for a happy continuance of the sentiments that bound them together; for gratitude on one side, and pity on the other, was blended with an esteem for the character of each, that had sprung

up amid scenes of death and desolation, whose impression could not be obliterated by time. And when, after the death of his father, Thomas succeeded to his office as verger, and saw his young family springing about him, he felt happy and grateful, trusting in God's good providence and his own exertions for the future. Far from envying his brother what was generally considered his good fortune, his heart was filled with a godly sorrow for him, knowing that the riches of this world take to themselves wings and fly away, and that he was cleaving to an unsubstantial good. It was a great grief to him, too, in his joy as well as in his subsequent sorrow, to feel that all brotherly communion with one so near to him was withheld. For the faith of Thomas Marples was destined to be tried in the fiery furnace of affliction, and one by one his children dropped into the grave,—the last survivor, a fair and fragile girl, giving small promise of being reared to womanhood. In this child, the affections of both parents centred with an intensity that frequently prompted Thomas himself to pray against yielding to the idol-worship to which the human heart is too much prone. Yielding to a presentiment that he should lose her, though in a manner different to what happened, he more sedulously applied himself to the task of sowing the good seed, and

leading her thoughts to God. And the girl was a docile and gentle, and apparently earnest recipient of these teachings, which had always formed so large a part of her brief life. Brought up in seclusion and in constant communion with two earnest spirits, there was an air of refinement about her that added a grace to her fragile beauty, —a solemnity of thought that prevented her shy, timid manner degenerating into awkwardness. Over the mother's heart no such cloud as that which overshadowed Thomas Marples lingered. Already bereaved almost beyond her woman's endurance, the thought of losing this last treasure was banished, simply because it was more than she could bear; and she yielded, not always without self-reproach, to a feeling of pride in her daughter's beauty, which was talked of far and near, and which frequently attracted the notice of the visitors to the cathedral, where she was often to be found at the side of her father, who had familiarised her with every record of the place. Much in this way had come to the knowledge of Mrs. Marples, which she did not repeat to her husband, and which made her own heart tremble even while the gratified vanity of a mother filled her eyes with proud, deep-drawn tears. The delicacy of constitution, united to a corresponding sensitiveness of mind, that had impressed Thomas

Marples with a conviction that his child would die early, had only served, united with her beauty, to lead the mother to a belief that she was destined to rise out of her station; to carry the grace of her gentle manners and her piety to a sphere far above that in which she had been born. There was something too exacting and secret in this mother's pride to be borne easily; and to Margaret Marples, when she knelt down in prayer, came ever a conviction that she had strayed from the right way in encouraging hopes in which she knew her husband would not share,—thoughts that formed for the first time a gulf betwixt their free communion. He, too, had his secret; he had consulted a physician, who gave him little hope that Alice's life might be spared, though the symptoms of the insidious disease that had swept away the rest of his children were as yet only slightly developed in her. By day and by night he prayed for strength to communicate this worst sorrow to his wife.

Meanwhile the bloom on Alice's cheek deepened, her eyes grew brighter, and Thomas Marples listened night after night to the dry, short cough that broke the stillness of her chamber. He knew that the time was come in which he could delay his painful task no longer.

Alice had been invited to spend a week with

the family of a farmer residing some miles from the city, and her father took the opportunity of her absence to prepare his wife for an approaching longer separation. But Margaret Marples had allowed her heart to wander too far away into the world to allow the two to weep together as those who are not without hope; and she rebelled against the dispensation with a pertinacity of despair that more than all his previous sorrow burdened the soul of her husband. Her first impulse was to fly to her child, with a vague thought that by being near her she could detain her longer upon earth; but even while she was making preparation to go, a messenger arrived who was destined to prove to her that there are worse evils upon earth than the evil of death.

The burly farmer at whose house she had been staying, arrived early in the morning in a state of great perturbation. Alice, he said, had been missing since the preceding evening. She had gone alone in the twilight to visit at a neighbouring farm-house, which, however, she had not reached. After sending there and not finding her, they had searched the country round all night. A shepherd-boy said he had heard the screams of a woman, and a labourer had noticed a post-chaise driving rapidly along the road just at the fall of the night. Was it possible that Alice

had been carried away by force, and by whom, and for what?

God punishes with immediate stripes the disobedience of His chosen, though He bears long with the iniquity of them that bide His time. Margaret Marples fell, stricken alike by conviction and death, when she heard this terrible doom of one whom she had grudged giving to the Lord in her purity. Frail in health, and riper for the sickle than she had imagined herself to be, the mortal part gave way at once. Into the agonised heart of her husband she poured the full tide of her most penitential confession, and died with a prayer upon her lips for him and for the lost. The most just and upright amongst men have their times in which to cry—"All thy waves have gone over me," and so Thomas Marples cried now. He left the corpse of his wife to join in the vain search for Alice. Nothing further was to be learned except that the post-chaise was seen by others on its course, but the track was soon lost. Every means of obtaining information was tried without avail, and after weeks of vain effort and agonising suspense, Thomas Marples rested in a stupor of grief that left him helpless, hopeless, prayerless.

No heavier affliction could have fallen upon him than this. He had resigned himself to the

thought of yielding his child to God; but to lose her thus in the world, young as she was—scarcely fifteen—hovering on the brink of the grave as she was; the thoughts that crowded upon him were too horrible to be borne; and by day and by night his fast friend, Stephen Leath, watched him as he writhed in his strong agony, fearing to leave even him, great as had been his faith and trust in the Lord, alone with that mighty sorrow shaking his very soul in its helplessness as a reed is shaken by the tempest. In those terrible hours to which Thomas always dreaded looking back, Stephen Leath was a great stay to him. For though the latter was no believer in Christianity, and there was only the human sympathy between them, this was much at a time when most others kept aloof, or stung him by lamenting that Alice had not been differently brought up; by repeating all that had been before repeated about making a show of her beauty, and by dragging forward various prophecies that she would come to some such end. By shutting the door against this croaking, even when it came in the shape of Canon Dixon himself, Stephen stood his friend in good stead, at a time when he needed no aggravation of his sharp sufferings. He was the better able to perform those good offices, because he was generally supposed to be rich, and none knew better than he

that such a reputation secured to him privileges that might be turned to account in aiding the oppressed. That no thought of using them for a selfish purpose ever entered his heart was some proof that he had not altogether strayed out of the right way.

This Stephen Leath, also the son of parents in rather humble circumstances, was an early companion to both the brothers Marples. Though, being himself of an enterprising turn, he might have been supposed to have had most sympathy with David, the younger of the two, a mutual dislike kept them asunder even in boyhood, whilst betwixt the elder and himself a strong attachment sprung up that survived all their after-differences of opinion. Stephen Leath seemed to tread fast in the steps of David Marples in the matter of worldly success. He was apprenticed to a silversmith and jeweller, to whose business he eventually succeeded; his only sister was married to an attorney, with whom she removed to London; and Stephen, in his bachelorhood and with his flourishing business, was looked upon as a man likely to acquire much wealth.

Betwixt him and his friend Thomas Marples there was the sympathy of congenial tastes. Both were eager in the pursuit of knowledge, both had great musical talent, and Stephen possessed a

natural genius for the acquisition of languages, making himself master of several dead as well as living tongues. Whatever it was that in his worldly struggle had caused him to sink into the chaos of infidelity, he kept his own counsel, attending the church and advocating the cause of Christianity after his own caustic manner, and only confiding his real opinions to Thomas Marples, with whom he could not dissemble, and from whom alone he could bear contradiction or reproof. For respecting in the latter, what was with him a sincere practice, free from conventional profession, he could listen to his frequent long admonitions with admirable patience, and even rejoice at the actual good resulting from the belief of his unfortunate and single-minded friend.

And thus it happened, that when in his great affliction Thomas Marples seemed to reject all consolation, Stephen was the only one at hand to remind him that he was dishonouring the faith to which he had cleaved through life; and such a rebuke coming from such a quarter had its effect in rousing him, in bringing to his soul a startling conviction of its heavy sin in thus making nought before the eyes of an unbeliever of the rich stores of God's grace; and he forthwith girded himself up and went straight to

Christ with his heavy trouble, and found the chaos of his thoughts shaped into a plan and a purpose.

For when the tumult of his mind had thus, in some degree, subsided, it seemed clear to him that the abductor of his daughter (he never for a moment imagined that she had gone away of her own freewill) was a man of wealth, and one who had some knowledge of him and his concerns; and bringing into review before him the families of note in the neighbourhood, he fixed upon that of the widowed Lady Leigh, the sister-in-law of the Dean, and daughter of an earl, whose son, a lieutenant in the army and noted for his wild courses, had recently been down on a visit to his relatives. His suspicions fastened upon this man with a pertinacity that might not be put aside; and confiding them to Stephen Leath, the latter approved of his determination to go to London, vowed that he would see him and his child righted if it cost him all he was worth, and took upon himself the task of shutting up the desolate house after Thomas Marples departed.

Alice had been missing two months when her father arrived in London. He proceeded at once to the Army and Navy Club and there obtained the lieutenant's private address, but it was many days before he could meet with himself. When he did at length obtain an interview, the well-

feigned astonishment of the lieutenant at the charge preferred against him, his ready sympathy with the bereaved father, and above all, his solemn protestations of innocence, staggered Thomas Marples, and he was beginning to be ashamed of his suspicions in this quarter when he detected a glance of intelligence betwixt the master and his servant, who was present, that served to confirm them at once. He resolved not to leave the house until his child was restored to him, and the result was that he was handed over to the police, and on the following day brought before the sitting magistrate at Marlborough-street. Thomas Marples told his own tale, but he could bring forward no proof to sustain the charge; and when the lieutenant protested, "on his word of honour," that he knew nothing of the girl, the magistrate was satisfied, and the disconsolate father was warned not to continue the system of annoyance he had commenced.

He wrote immediately to Lady Leigh and the Dean, reiterating his own conviction and begging their interference; and a letter arrived from the latter to say that "if his nephew had formed an improper connection, means would be taken to break it off." Those few cold words, and nothing more. It was not known to Thomas Marples that the lieutenant was on the eve of proceeding

to India with his regiment; he knew nothing of this intention until he heard that he had already set sail, and then he was beset by a new horror—had Alice departed with him?

Overcome by fatigue and distress, he was lying sick at his lodgings, when Stephen Leath arrived, bringing with him a letter from Alice. It was dated from a small street in Pimlico. Shame, and heart-broken sorrow, and sickness unto death, had conspired to make it almost illegible. It stated that she had no money to take her home if she could summon strength or courage to return there; it spoke, too, of horrors from which she must fly at once or die, and she implored that her parents would see her once more. It was not long before the father received his fainting child into his arms; and then he and Stephen Leath listened to a tale of inhuman outrage that went nigh to drive them both mad. The child had never spoken with Lieutenant Leigh, only just knew him by sight, until she met him under that roof, where she had arrived in a state of terror that threatened her with instant dissolution. He was alarmed at her state and left her, and she was attended by the woman of the house, and soothed with promises of being sent home. She was kept a close prisoner, and not allowed to write; and one evening she fell into a stupor that she thought was the

approach of death, but she awoke from it to understand that she had been fearfully wronged, and then she bowed down her head in deep shame, and prayed to die.

Unable to overcome her deep horror at his presence, the lieutenant ceased to trouble her with his visits, and at length a letter arrived from him in which he advised her to return home. She was too ill to undertake a journey by herself; she had no money, for he sent her none; and, above all, shame had bowed down her very soul, and she shrank from the thought of seeing those who had known her in her purity. In this state, the mistress of the house informed her that she must provide herself with other lodgings, or with means of payment; and she recommended a life of infamy: and then the girl's spirit was roused, and she wrote to her father.

Thomas Marples carried the wreck of his dying child home, and the thoughtfulness of Stephen Leath had prepared everything for their reception.

When David Marples saw fit to forget his brother, he resigned a sister to the same oblivion. Betsy Marples, being an only daughter, had devoted a large portion of her life to attendance on an infirm mother, who lived to a great age. Working hard at her business of dressmaking, she contrived to maintain an independence, of which she was

proud, and on which she would not allow any one to encroach. Sharp in temper, and altogether eccentric, she held little intercourse even with her favourite brother Thomas, and no one dared mention before her the name of David, of whose existence she was more oblivious than he could be of hers, as her subordinate place in the town, like his brother's, was a constant annoyance to him. It was a marvel to many, and to none more than Thomas Marples himself, how Stephen Leath had prevailed upon this hard-tempered and self-contained woman so far as to induce her to break through all the habits of her previous life, and entirely devote herself to her kindred in their sore extremity. The unhappy travellers found her in the home to which they hastened; all that was womanly in her nature was roused by the sufferings of Alice; and, if she could not supply the place of the mother that was lost, she would suffer no strange hand to interfere, but faithfully performed the duties of the place she had taken.

Alice lingered through four months, and died in giving premature birth to a female child. This child, contrary to all expectation, was strong and healthy, and Betsy Marples, now secluded altogether from the world, devoted herself to the task of rearing it. The townspeople readily fell in with the humour of her and her brother to keep en-

tirely to themselves. There was a general idea that Alice Marples had taken a great liberty in going off with the nephew of the Dean, and the son of so dignified a person as Lady Leigh; and, though both stood aloof in lofty security and scornful silence, and would have been horrified at any one mentioning the circumstance to them as in any way concerning themselves, it seemed a matter of propriety that every man should set his face against that portion of the Marples family with whom had originated an attempt to invade the peace of distinguished people.

Thomas Marples himself voluntarily bowed down his head with humility. He had prided himself in an honest name, and his heart seemed to wither at the breath of disgrace. It was too late to seek for redress, and his religion forbade him to cherish feelings of revenge, and he felt that enough was known of the circumstances to claim for his child all the forbearance that might be hoped for from earthly judges. Going even amongst the poor and the afflicted less than was his wont, he obtained the soubriquet of the "spectre verger," from the circumstance of being seldom seen except at his post. And as age crept on him, and the child grew, these habits of seclusion became more confirmed. Centring all his affections in her, and jealous of her happiness, he dreaded above all

things her coming in contact with those who might taunt her with the stigma of her birth, and so overcloud her mind with the shadows of sin and sorrow before its impulses were trained or its energies developed. Margaret Marples, therefore, was brought up in solitude; and Stephen Leath, besides devoting himself more than ever to his friend, set himself the task of superintending her education. He found her of quick capacity, and began to take delight in his work. Leaving her religious instruction entirely to her grandfather, he laboured hard to perfect her in such studies as would enable her to be a teacher of others; and her own diligence and natural bent towards inquiry and improvement were his reward.

This seclusion of the child, Margaret Marples, and this training superior to her station, which some way became known, was an additional offence in the eyes of many. It was remembered against Thomas Marples that he had brought up his daughter Alice in much the same way, in defiance of the remonstrances of Archdeacon Dixon, who had urged him to send her to the parish school, and subsequently into service. It amused Stephen Leath, who was too rich to be assailed in a coarse manner, to see how the general obloquy worked against himself; for he came in for a share of it. Men touched him tenderly on

the subject of wasting his time and money in a mistaken care for others; and Archdeacon Dixon, in a very bland manner, admonished him on the folly of fostering pretence in people who could only be ruined by imbibing ideas that were unsuited to their station. Hearing all and saying little, Stephen Leath persevered in his own way until the child Margaret had nearly attained her fifteenth year; and then there came a rumour that Lieutenant, now Colonel Leigh, was about to return from India, loaded with honours, after an absence of fifteen years.

CHAPTER III.

THIS was the substance of what I learned, chiefly from Uncle Stephen. He was outspoken, because he wished to neutralise the effect of my grandfather's teaching, which led me to expect more from the world than I should find. My first feeling was an intense loathing for Colonel Leigh and all his kin, that extended to myself; so that I would gladly have poured into the earth the portion of blood I inherited from them. The outburst of my own scorn was too full and earnest to admit of a care about theirs, with the world to approve and back it. I was sufficiently sustained by contemplating in them the cold-blooded villany and ignoble subterfuge and unblushing mock-worship that excited my abhorrence, and to which I could not myself stoop. I was too young and inexperienced, too much accustomed to look at

and reverence the word of God as it stood, to believe that such conduct could pass unreproved amongst a Christian people, much less receive general approbation.

I still distrusted Uncle Stephen, as one who evidently was strongly prejudiced against Christians and Christianity; the more so, when I learned from Aunt Betsy that he did not even believe in the existence of a God. If what he said respecting the world was true, I had more than ever need of God as a refuge from its injustice. His doctrine was so revolting to me, so altogether unnatural, that I could not help shrinking from him, even while I admired and respected his steady friendship for my grandfather, and felt grateful for the great care and pains he had bestowed upon myself, who had no claim upon him. There was some unacknowledged faltering in my resistance to Uncle Stephen's view of things. In losing him as an uncle I had gained another, a man of wealth and reputation, an undoubted Christian; for he was a great benefactor to St. Mary's Church, which he constantly attended, and a promoter of missions; yet from this man I had never received any notice; I was until now quite unconscious of his existence. That he stood high in the estimation of his fellow-citizens, was evident from the fact of

his having recently been elected mayor; that he had no sympathy with us was made equally clear by his being at the head of those who were eager to do honour to Colonel Leigh. Good Christians these men were considered to be, and our own private wrongs, about which the world cared nothing, alone enabled us to dispute the position. I saw enough to stagger one called upon to search so narrowly into individual practice as I was. Except that the name "Infidel" was a bugbear to me, all I knew of Uncle Stephen reflected high honour on his heart and principles, and I was ashamed to find myself shrinking from him, even more than I did from the so-called Christians, in whose profession I had no trust. One thing seemed certain—the law of God was less regarded than from my grandfather's teaching I had supposed it to be; that other law of this world, of which Uncle Stephen had spoken, and from which I could hope little, ruled more universally. Well! there was a stern battle with life before me, and I had a strong, determined will, and a stout heart.

In the midst of many dangerous doubts and perplexities I learned much that it was good for me to know. More than ever I loved and reverenced my grandfather; I was compelled to admire his patience in tribulation: there was

something sublime about his steadfast faith kept in the midst of fiery trial, and which the mysterious dispensations of this world could not shake. I felt that I had been unjust to Aunt Betsy; under the rough exterior that had so readily repelled me I had failed to discern the real goodness of heart, the straightforward sense of duty and right that had enabled her to break through the habits of years, and devote herself to uncongenial labours, and brave all the sorrow and disgrace that had fallen upon her brother's home. I cleaved to these two with my whole heart; I longed in my turn to labour for them, to prove that the gratitude I felt was something more than the passing impulse to which I could give no words.

It was, perhaps, well for me that I did not at once see all the disgrace of my position, all the disadvantage that it would prove to me in the world. I had to learn more of its customs before I could understand that every penalty of that position must fall upon myself; that guiltless as I supposed myself to be, I must stand in the place of the guilty, so far as its judgments were concerned. I felt the disgrace without allowing it to crush me; it was a cloud that I might break through, a load that I might cast off. I had youth and health and, probably, a long life before me; in other places, and amidst other people, I

should be judged by my own actions, and I had a semi-savage sort of pride in the thought of thus struggling and triumphing in my loneliness.

I was soon called upon to put my good resolutions into practice. My unexpected appearance before my father had given great offence to the Dean: it was considered by all to have been a concerted plan betwixt me and my grandfather; it showed an inclination to prefer claims that were not to be thought about, and threatened a series of annoyances that were not to be borne. It is the peculiar privilege of the great people of this world, that they have little need to interfere personally with dirty work. There are plenty to do it for them in an underhand way, or to battle for them openly; and on this occasion, while the Dean and Colonel and Lady Leigh stood aloof in dignified silence, the whole staff of under-churchmen, with Archdeacon Dixon at their head, undertook the task of reproof. I was sitting at my music-lesson, a few days after that important Sunday, when the latter gentleman, without knocking, walked through the outer room into mine. He was a stout, portly man, with a particularly florid complexion, a bustling importance of manner, and having altogether the self-satisfied look that characterises those who occupy a good place in the world, and know how to make the

most of it. I had never been exposed to vulgarity or impertinence; my grandfather, being a Christian, had the bearing of a perfect gentleman; and Uncle Stephen had a native dignity of manner, never uncourteous when most severe, that he rarely put off in my presence. At the first glance I saw that I must expect rude treatment at the hands of this Archdeacon, who had burst upon me so abruptly, and who asked, in a blustering tone, first, why I was idling my time there; and next, where my grandfather was.

I had risen up at his entrance, and I told him that my grandfather was not in.

"Where is your aunt?"

My aunt had heard us speaking, and appeared to answer for herself. I was going away, when the Archdeacon called me back:

"Stop here, girl; I want to talk to you. Why don't you," he continued, "set that great wench to the wash-tub, instead of allowing her to waste her time in this way? What do you think you are going to make of her?"

"Archdeacon Dixon," said my aunt, bristling up, as she very well could, "this is the first time that any one has taken the trouble to make inquiry about that child, and I think the least people can do is to let us take our own course with her. If she satisfy us that is enough."

"My good woman, you don't know what you are talking about," said the Archdeacon. "If you don't teach her to make herself properly useful, she must trouble somebody. Bless my life, you haven't a fortune to leave her! Now let me hear what she is fit for: Wouldn't you like a place, eh?"

This was addressed to me. I was about to say that I was in my grandfather's hands and ready to do anything he wished, when my aunt interposed.

"She has not been brought up for the kind of place you would like to put her in, but she has been taught to know that she must earn her own living, and please God she will do that. You may go away, Margaret; for if there's anything more to be asked, I can answer myself."

I was very thankful for this order, and left the room. I heard their voices for some time after in loud altercation, and when my aunt rejoined me, her face was flushed and her manner excited. She told me to go to my lesson again.

Every fresh contact with the world seemed worse than the last. The visit of the Archdeacon had left a very painful impression upon me. It showed me the manner in which the world takes rather rough liberties with those

whose lot is lowly, and placed another minister of God before me in an unfavourable light. I felt that I must yield a little more in Uncle Stephen's favour; that if all Christians resembled those I had hitherto come in contact with, I should be inclined to turn to him, and such as him, heart and soul. I tried to resume my lesson, but could not. My mind was disturbed, and my thoughts wandered far away into the dark depths of the world, in which I anticipated I should have to undergo many changes, until, in my final self, little would remain of the dreaming, wavering creature I was then. Uncle Stephen had spoken of Christianity as a worn-out system; of its professors as men whose practice turned it into a mockery. If this were true, I thought it would be a better world in which men rejected it altogether; because the habit of a daily lie in the many, left little chance for the sincerity of the few. Then, Christianity was exacting, it enjoined patience and forbearance under affliction and wrong; humility to the down-trodden; no turning again to the smitten; meek endurance and long-suffering to the death. From the little I had as yet seen, I understood how readily any earnest follower of Christ, whose riches were not of this world, might find occasion to put these virtues into practice. What a victim

he might become to those who despised his belief, while they made use of it for their own ends! I dwelt upon this idea until it took a shape, and I saw my grandfather in his tribulation, and thought of Uncle Stephen's words when they conversed together. If poverty makes humility imperative, it should not, amongst a Christian people, make nothing of a great wrong; and I could not help seeing that if my grandfather had been rich, and Colonel Leigh poor, and, therefore, insignificant, the world's sympathy would have been with us. I saw all the mockery of Christian profession in those who suffered such things to be. My grandfather himself had not acted with sincerity; he had allowed me to think too well of the world, to express and cherish in my heart reverence for those whom he knew to be undeserving of it, and I could not consider this a small or excusable error, feeling as I did how much it had tended to shake my faith. Uncle Stephen alone had not deceived me. I had found life and men as he painted them—with a rough hand and dark colours, but so generally true that there was no mistaking the likeness. The authoritative dictation and scornful manner of Archdeacon Dixon had worked a wonderful change in me in the course of half an hour. I contrasted my grandfather's feebleness

with Uncle Stephen's strength, the one bending under a galling yoke, the other boldly asserting his own free will; and in a paroxysm of overwrought feeling I extended my arms and uttered the name of Uncle Stephen, in a wild cry for help.

Deeply absorbed as I was, I had not observed that Uncle Stephen had entered the room from the kitchen. He took my hands in his, and held them fast.

"What is Uncle Stephen to help you in? What is the matter?" he asked. "I was just about to scold when you nearly knocked me down with that sudden outbreak. Why, your hands are hot, and your face is all in a glow; have you been asleep and dreaming?"

Aunt Betsy walked forward and answered for me.

"You should have been here a little while ago," she said. "We have had a visit from Archdeacon Dixon. You know his pompous manner, and how he likes to lord it where he can. Well, he walked straight into this room, and wanted to know why Margaret was allowed to idle her time, and asked what she was fit for, and if she would like a place."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Uncle Stephen, drawing a chair forward, seating himself, and still keeping hold of my hand.

"Yes, that's it," said Aunt Betsy; "that's what must always be where people won't or can't stand up for themselves. You know, Stephen Leath, that before I came here, I had a pride in my independence, and maintained it; no one dared say to me what Archdeacon Dixon did to-day."

"I know; I always said you were a brave woman, Betsy—one of the right sort—one that would neither take wrong nor do it. As to this child, if he has anything to say about her, let him come to me. I suppose his impertinence has put her in this fever. I'll let him know it mustn't happen again; your Uncle Stephen can protect you so far, Margaret. Confound the people! What a nest of hornets this Dean and Chapter affair is! It would be pleasant getting to heaven without them. There, it isn't worth crying about, Margaret; and people who sit down to weep over their troubles are fit for nothing."

I sobbed convulsively, but only for a moment. I dashed the tears from my eyes, and lifted my head. "You see," I said, "they can labour to put down and degrade me—these people who will do nothing else! They are right in supposing I am old enough to earn my own livelihood. It is time I left this place, where I can only be a burden upon my grandfather."

"That is the right sort of spirit, Margaret," said Uncle Stephen; "but you must have patience,—your education is scarcely completed. As to the rest, I think I can now let you go into the world with some confidence."

"I shall go, expecting little mercy at the hands of Christians," I said. "I could pray that I might find all like you, Uncle Stephen."

"Or like your grandfather," said Aunt Betsy, sharply; "what fault have you to find with your grandfather?"

"There are none like him; he is too good for this world as it is. Better than I shall ever be; better than I *would* be. I will not lie down to be trampled on by orthodox feet. I will turn heathen sooner, for the followers of Mahomet do exhibit some traits of nobleness."

"What have you been teaching this child, Stephen Leath?"

"I! Nay, you may thank your high churchmen for these notions. Margaret is excited, and speaks under the impulse of the moment. You should have some sympathy with a spirit so like your own, Betsy; you would not like to see this child in the hands of those who would like nothing better than to bring her as low as possible."

"Would'nt they like it?" said Aunt Betsy, excited. "You know that in spite of Thomas, I

have always said I hope to see the day when we should be revenged."

"The best revenge will be keeping out of their way, and rising in spite of them," said Uncle Stephen, placing his hand on my head in the caressing manner that had in the last few days become usual with him. "I predict a bright career for Margaret. In a few years most of these people will be dead, and she will not think them worth remembering. I come to tell you that I am going to London in a few days, and I shall, perhaps, be absent a fortnight. You, Margaret, be diligent whilst I am away. Tell Thomas I shall want to see him in the evening."

He left us, and Aunt Betsy called me into the kitchen.

"You are getting into high favour with Uncle Stephen, I think," she said. "You may learn more from him than is good for you to know. What has he been saying to you against Christianity?"

"Nothing; he only speaks against those who profess it to little purpose, and he can say no worse of them than I find."

"All Christians are not alike."

"Are they not all alike in this place where my grandfather's long life of piety and humble usefulness has only gained him one friend, and that an

infidel, because he is poor? where his brother is honoured for the one recommendation of wealth? where such people as Colonel Leigh can commit any wickedness with impunity? If I find no better amongst the thousands in this city, what am I to hope elsewhere?"

"The people here are bad enough," said Aunt Betsy, "but that is not the fault of Christianity. It is because they have none of it in them."

"Has the Dean none, nor Archdeacon Dixon, nor Lady Leigh, who goes every day to prayers, nor David Marples, who you say has given a new organ to St. Mary's, and gives hundreds to the missionaries? After all, true religion consists in such practice as Uncle Stephen's. You say he was a good son, a good brother, and—I myself feel that he has been a good friend."

"You are learning to talk too fast," said Aunt Betsy, in her harshest manner. "Uncle Stephen is one in a million for his way of thinking. If all these people were like him, without religion altogether, we shouldn't be able to live amongst them. Who amongst them would care what they did, if like Stephen Leath they expected to lie down at last and go to dust like a dog?"

Her words fairly made me start. I had never taken this view of the case; on the contrary, I had been pleasing myself with the thought of

future punishment for these people, and reward for Uncle Stephen. From this too absorbing present my thoughts wandered back to the noble men and women of whom I had read, whose lives, sometimes through storm and darkness, bore testimony to the truths of God, and whose deaths glorified Him. I considered my own weakness, and felt the extent of my folly, and that night I prayed fervently for grace to keep me in the right way. Several days passed quietly. Uncle Stephen, as I continued to call him, had gone to London, and the more than usually serious manner of my grandfather, and his frequent allusions to the great danger and sin of doubt and unbelief in matters pertaining to God, led me to suppose that Aunt Betsy had alarmed him by repeating the sentiments I had expressed. In his own quiet way he selected for our reading the noblest examples of Christian life, and I felt ashamed that it was deemed necessary to go over this ground once more, for the express purpose of convincing me that the believers in Christ were capable of acting worthily. I felt this without recovering from the shock I had received. The persons I was called upon to admire had been long dead, and I had yet to find their likeness amongst the living. I could only be content to hope on, and search further, without giving up my opinion of

those who had excited my disgust. "It must needs be that offences come, but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh."

Uncle Stephen had been absent a week when I was one day surprised by the entrance of a strange man into the house. He accompanied my grandfather into every room, and I soon found that he was taking an inventory of the furniture. This puzzled without alarming me. I wondered if my grandfather had any thought of leaving the place, but that seemed too good news to be true. I was sewing in my own room, and I took my work into the kitchen in the hope that Aunt Betsy would say something, but she was unusually busy, and took no notice of me. The inner door was open, and I saw the man pause beside the piano.

"This," said my grandfather, "belongs to Mr. Leath," and they passed on. During the time they were in the kitchen, my grandfather glanced wistfully at Aunt Betsy as the man was inspecting a dresser.

"This," he said, "belongs to my sister. I scarcely feel that I am doing right by letting all these things go together, Betsy."

"Say no more about it," said my aunt. "I have cast my lot with you and the child; if you go, I will not be left behind."

Joyful news! We were, then, going somewhere; perhaps to join Uncle Stephen in London.

The knowledge that at all events we should quit that place satisfied me, and I sat in a silent trance of happiness, well content to wait patiently until I might learn more. It was not until we were all seated after tea, in what may be called my grandfather's study, that either he or my aunt showed any intention to enlighten me, and I was determined to ask no questions until one of them had spoken. It was a rough winter night; hail mixed with rain rattled against the upper windows, and the shutters below shook in the strong blast.

"Draw your chair nearer the fire, Margaret," said my grandfather; "we must have a long talk together to-night. I wish you to believe that I have always done my best for you; that, more than anything else, I have your interest at heart in what I am about to do. You have sometimes thought that I was not quite sincere with you, that I kept you too much and too long in the dark:—that was respecting the past. It concerns you to understand clearly what are your prospects in the future. I will conceal nothing from you, not even what may give you pain. I have lost the means of maintaining you here, Margaret; I have been dismissed from the cathedral."

My heart sank at once. It was necessity, then, not choice, that was driving him away; and—miserable me—was not I the cause of this injustice to one who had grown old in the service of the church?

"What makes you turn so white, child?" said Aunt Betsy. "You must not fear to look the future in the face, or to work."

"I fear neither," I said; "but it is I that have brought this evil upon my grandfather in his old age. I wish I had never been born!"

"You are wrong altogether, Margaret," said my grandfather, gently. "Listen to me. You have strong feelings, and you yield to them too readily: this habit will lead you into all kinds of error. The fault lies altogether with those who originally refused to recognise their own sin, and who were reckless about overwhelming others with it. I was prepared for what has happened, years ago. It is true, Margaret, that the Dean has looked upon me with an unfavourable eye ever since your birth, and your sudden appearance before your father—as he believes with my consent—tried his endurance too far. I do not regret that circumstance now; I do not murmur against any one. There are better modes of remedying evil. In the first place, we would not—any of us three—change places with these

people. That is a wonderful advantage. We all have good health, and even I have some strength left: I am strong in the hope of God's help. I am not compelled to go away in a hurry, but I think it best to leave this place at once, and go where we shall be better able to help one another. We shall go to London. I have a little money, and I shall obtain more by the sale of the furniture, which Jackson will take at a valuation. When we have settled down, we shall have time to look about us."

I began to be more hopeful. In London I should obtain employment, and the thought of being enabled to help my grandfather reconciled me to anything.

"And we shall see Uncle Stephen in London," I said.

"I was coming to Uncle Stephen," said my grandfather. "He has been a kind friend to you and me, and we both owe him gratitude and respect; but there are many reasons that for the present forbid us holding any communication with him. I have no need to fear speaking openly of his principles, lest they should throw Christianity into the shade; you have found him merciful where others with better light have been unmerciful; but he would prove the worst enemy you ever had, if he instilled into you notions that

would lead your heart from God, and peril the loss of your immortal soul. I do not distrust Stephen Leath; it is my very faith in his straightforward dealing that makes me resolve to keep you out of his reach. When he first undertook the task of educating you, he promised not to interfere with your religious instruction, and he kept his word, as I knew he would. The other day he apprised me that as you had arrived at an age to judge for yourself, and especially as you seemed to have conceived a disgust for Christian dealing, he should no longer keep silent, but give you a chance of discerning betwixt the true and the false according to his own views. I was again bound to believe that he meant what he said, and my resolve is that, he shall have no opportunity of corrupting you, for corruption it is, Margaret, of the worst kind, when men attempt to prove God a liar, and to put in place of His truth their own blind and merely instinctive notions of what is right. I have laboured to bring you up in the fear of the Lord, and to see you fall away from it would break my heart. Only a little longer I may be with you; let me depart with the hope that we shall meet again."

I threw my arms round my grandfather's neck and wept. This earnestness cut me to the

heart, and I could not bear that he should doubt me.

"Have I not been altogether taught by you?" I said; "have I not seen how God can be all-sufficient to them that have nothing to support them in this world? Do not fear me!"

"God bless you, child!" he said: "all my prayer is, that you may not be tempted out of the way."

"But we need not be unkind to Uncle Stephen," I said. "In London, if he remains here, I shall see nothing of him: we may correspond with him?"

"There are reasons why we should not do even that," said my grandfather. "Sit still and hear me. For many years before you were born, Stephen was in a flourishing way of business. He had a taste for travel, and was frequently absent on the Continent, leaving everything at home in the hands of his foreman. Whether he suffered in this way or not I do not know, but he did in another. His sister was married to an attorney, who frequently borrowed large sums from him, and for whom he became bound, just before his death, on the eve of bankruptcy. He lost thousands of pounds at that time, and was compelled to give up business in order to avoid being a bankrupt himself. All this was not generally known, and

people supposed he had retired rich. His sister was left with a young son, and Stephen had to provide for both of them. This young man, George Ratcliffe, has been brought up at the bar: he has been about twelve months in practice, and it is on his affairs that Stephen is gone to London. Apart from the sum that he has sunk for his nephew and his sister, I know that he has barely enough to exist upon. If he comes to understand our troubles, he will insist upon helping us, and still further impoverishing himself. We owe him enough already: he has toiled and suffered enough, too, on our account. We must be independent: we will write and tell him this, and that if we prosper he shall hear of our prosperity. It is right that we should struggle for ourselves."

I could say nothing against this: I already owed enough to Uncle Stephen, and I pleased myself with the thought of sending him accounts of my prosperity as his best reward. Both my grandfather and myself wrote to him that night, letters which were to be left behind us, and then I was told that we should depart from —— in two days.

We employed the intervening time in packing up, taking amongst our ordinary luggage such relics of home as a portion of my grandfather's books and mine, and a few things that Aunt Betsy

prized. This extraordinary movement, and the bustle of it, and the prospect of seeing London and doing something for myself, so exhilarated my spirits that I seemed quite another creature. From the back windows of the house we had a view of the stately mansion of David Marples, embosomed in trees; and as I looked at it from the kitchen, I thought of him and Colonel Leigh, and gloried in the consciousness of owing them nothing: and from the depths of a proud, sanguine spirit came an assurance that one day I should be able to lift my head above theirs, even in this world. With the flush of anticipated triumph upon my cheek, I passed into the inner room. The complete abstraction of my thoughts unfitted me at the moment for any outward application, and as I stood idly, I heard Aunt Betsy moving in the sitting-room.

"The poor old man!" she murmured: "and he so fond of his books and quiet—this is enough to kill him!"

I needed bringing down from my proud thoughts of self. I walked slowly up to my bedroom and knelt in prayer, and wept and tried to humble myself. This woman, of whom I had thought hardly through so many years, was nobler than I: in the midst of her own tribulation she could think of the feeble old man, driven from

the home that time had endeared to him, compelled to give up the habits of a long life; whilst I, who had brought sorrow upon both, was absorbed in selfish speculations. Although I seemed incapable of keeping myself in the right way, I was ready enough to follow it when it was pointed out to me; and sobered and saddened, I returned to my employment, and found my spirit strengthened by thinking more earnestly for others and less extravagantly for myself.

Though it must have been known to many that my grandfather had received his dismissal from the cathedral, few were aware of his intention to leave the city. Several poor people called, with tears in their eyes, to thank him for good services which they had the gratitude to remember: and one old verger bewailed himself so bitterly, and exclaimed so vehemently against the injustice that had been exercised, that all my grandfather's efforts to quiet him were in vain. Beyond this we had no leave-taking; we were quitting one desert place for another, and the confidence with which we went forth had yet to be tried.

It was quite dark when we quitted the house for the last time to go by the early coach. Even I experienced a pang of regret when I heard Jackson, the man who had charge of the furniture, lock the door behind us. Amidst my eager hopes

I had not lost my fear of the world, and I felt it just possible that I might be taught to think more kindly of the home that had given peaceful shelter to my childhood. I clung closely to my grandfather's arm. He exhibited no emotion; and as to Aunt Betsy, when we arrived at the inn-yard, she bustled about in her usual manner amongst the boxes. The gas-light showed us three inside passengers, and there were two outside besides ourselves. When the coach at length started into the outer darkness, we could only guess from the sound of the wheels when it had quitted the paved streets of the city.

CHAPTER IV.

The day broke in a thick mist, that gradually cleared away, and before eleven o'clock the sun shone out brilliantly. The air was piercingly cold and frosty, chilling even my young blood, though I was well wrapped up. I was too much excited, however, to attend to this minor discomfort. Though I only saw in greater variety what I had seen before—houses and rivers, trees and fields, and very common-place looking human beings—I was disposed to be pleased with everything. The sense of freedom communicated by this rapid whirling through what seemed to me interminable space, suited me admirably, and losing every regretful thought for what I had left behind me, wondering how I had so well borne the dullness and insipidity of my past life, I com-

menced castle-building on a larger scale, and annihilated all difficulties at will.

This mood continued till the coach stopped before a lonely farm-house, at which a parcel had to be delivered. I observed a miserably-clad Irishwoman in the road, with a child at her back, and three others following her, half naked and shivering. I thought she was going to beg, and wished that my grandfather would give her something, but she approached a pump at which a man was filling a bucket, and asked leave to get water for a kettle she held in her hand. The man took no notice of her, but pumped on until he had filled two buckets, and then, to my consternation, he deliberately threw the contents of one of them over the woman and children, completely deluging them. Mixed with the cries of the children was a loud, hoarse laugh, proceeding from one of our fellow-passengers, and in which the coachman, who now came up, joined.

"Darn them Irish vermin!" exclaimed the coachman, "that just serves 'em right."

My grandfather threw some money to the shivering woman, and the coach passed on. The man whose mirth had first been excited by this scene, and who sat on the box, had been rebuked by him, and he now turned to reply.

"If it wasn't for such as you," he said, "we

should soon be rid of these vagabonds. The popish devils! why don't they keep in their own country? If I had my will, I'd hang them up as fast as they come."

Here the subject dropped. Our other fellow-passenger, who seemed from his dress to be a clergyman, was seated by himself at the back of the coach. He was a middle-aged man, stout, with a sallow, unwholesome complexion, and he had a particularly gloomy, abstracted look. I had turned towards him in the hope that he would interfere, but he was looking straight forward with the same sullen and apathetic expression of countenance; so that it was scarcely possible to suppose that he was aware of what was passing. Such scenes as I have described may not be common; but the whole affair, and the coarse mirth and brutality, and bitter animosity, and utter indifference which it served to exhibit, struck a chill to my heart. I was dragged down from the heights into which I had been soaring, and then a doubt fell upon me whether I had the strength of mind and purpose necessary to battle with the difficulties that possibly lay in my own path.

Thus veering about to all points of the mental compass, I found myself in London. I was not much impressed by anything I saw, which was

only a repetition of what I had seen before. There were the same houses and streets on a more extended scale; the same human beings in greater numbers. As far as we went, I saw nothing so grand as our own cathedral. The coach stopped to set down the clergymen, and my grandfather observing that we might as well stop there as anywhere else, descended also. Our boxes were speedily dragged from the roof, and we stood blocking up the pavement in the midst of the great crowd. I had fixed my eyes upon the clergyman, who had undergone a metamorphosis that astonished me. His brisk movements and the merry twinkle of his black eyes, which gave altogether a different expression to his countenance, made me almost doubt his identity. He was met by an odd-looking individual, who might have been a man or a boy—it was impossible to say which—dressed in ragged trousers, a coat that almost reached to his feet, and without a hat. His face, however, was wrinkled, and had a tough, leathery look, as if the skin was made of old parchment, and his small, mean, cunning eyes, in a chance glance at myself, seemed to look me through. The clergyman tossed his sole luggage, a carpet-bag, at this personage, with the exclamation—

"Here, Jem, take that, and look sharp."

Jem obeyed both orders. I was about to withdraw my lingering gaze from these two, when both turned round and looked back at us, and the clergyman approached, and spoke to my grandfather.

"If you want any one to carry your luggage," he said, "here is a poor fellow who will be glad of the job. He has a truck which he could bring in a few minutes."

"The truth is," said my grandfather, "I don't know where to go;—to some inn, I suppose, in the first place:—perhaps you, sir, could recommend me to one."

"Do you make any stay here? Do you want a private lodging?"

"Yes."

"Then," he continued, glancing first at Aunt Betsy, then at me, then again at my grandfather, "perhaps you could be accommodated at the house where I live,—that is, if you are not particular."

"Any humble place that is decent will suit us," said my grandfather. "I only fear that the abode you mention may be beyond my means."

"Ah, I see," said the clergyman, smiling and touching the sleeve of his coat, "all is not gold that glitters. I am compelled to lodge humbly myself; but mine is quite a respectable concern;

religious landlady, and all that; you won't find a cheaper place at all decent."

"Then we thank you for your courtesy, sir," said my grandfather; "and if you will lead the way we will follow."

"Let me see," said our new friend, taking a survey of the boxes. "Here, Jem, throw that carpet-bag here, and fetch the truck."

Jem obeyed and disappeared.

"Ever here before?" asked the clergyman.

"Only once," said my grandfather. "I am a stranger and a sojourner, for how long the Lord knows."

"We are all strangers and sojourners, and in places that bear no resemblance to Egypt, or the wilderness, or Canaan, for there the multitudes were fed," said the clergyman. "This is the modern Babel, of which Scripture does not give us due notice, in which all men speak a different language, only too well understood to mean the same thing—every one for himself. We are an odd flock to belong to one shepherd."

He stood against the wall with his arms folded, and in a shorter time than we expected, Jem made his appearance with the truck. Putting my grandfather aside, the clergyman helped Jem to place the boxes, and crowned them with his carpet-bag. He then politely offered his arm to

Aunt Betsy, who accepted it with a grim, sidelong glance at him, and placing my grandfather and me foremost, he followed in this order.

We accompanied Jem and the truck through many devious windings and turnings, until he stopped at the door of a three-storied house, in a narrow, third-rate street, where the children were playing in the gutters and idle women were standing at the doors and leaning out of the windows. The clergyman took us into the house and introduced us to the landlady, who said she had two furnished rooms to let, which we might have on the condition of always paying a week's rent beforehand. We then went to look at the rooms, and the bargain was concluded, and our boxes taken up-stairs.

Viewed by the light of a small candle, for it was four o'clock in the afternoon and growing dark, our new abode looked dismal enough. The furniture was scanty and mean, the walls dingy, and the fireless grates added to the general appearance of discomfort. Our landlady, too, was sufficiently repelling. The one recommendation of being religious scarcely atoned for the ungracious, distant manner, as if she was conferring an unwilling favour by admitting us,—for the particularly sour look, aided by a pair of suspicious eyes, and a mouth turned down most portentiously at

the corners. Whilst she left us to ourselves, our fellow-lodger brought up from his appartment on the second floor a skuttle-full of coals and some wood, and, resisting all Aunt Betsy's importunities, commenced lighting the fire.

"You are tired, my good lady," he said, "and being a bachelor I am used to this sort of work. Jem goes all my errands, and if you want anything you may trust him."

Upon this hint, Jem was despatched for such necessaries as were required to make tea. He also fetched us coals and wood, which were deposited in a cupboard in one of the rooms. The Reverend Mr. Chaundy—as we understood our fellow-lodger to be from a card which he gave us—displayed a general knowledge of the place by directing us where to look for such things as were immediately wanted; and, declining my grandfather's invitation to take tea with us, he promised to look in for an hour in the evening if we were not too tired to receive him. Aunt Betsy, good methodical house-wife as she was, was sadly put about. She did not mind all the cups and saucers being odd ones, and we extracted a little fun out of the fact of the knives not being made to cut, but a teapot with a broken spout annoyed her so much that she was with difficulty restrained from opening a large box to get at her own. Al-

together, however, we bore up pretty well, considering that the change we had undergone was worse than that from civilized to downright savage life; for every deterioration in the former is accompanied by an oppressive restraint, while the latter gives the perfect freedom that is more than an equivalent for difficulty. The first thing that struck me in our new abode was the general paucity of real work. The clearing up of our two rooms seemed merely child's play, so that I could not help wondering what was to become of Aunt Betsy unless she obtained some employment elsewhere. The buoyant hope of youth had again surmounted every difficulty with regard to myself.

Mr. Chaundy had made a favourable impression upon both my relatives; and, though his place of abode and his habits were alike odd for a minister of the Church, I do not think that either of them for a moment suspected that he was other than what he professed himself to be. My grandfather called a general council to consider the propriety and expediency of acquainting him with our object in coming to London, and asking his advice as to the manner of proceeding. Amongst the changes that had taken place, not the least gratifying to myself was that of being allowed to understand exactly what our

position and plans were, and to have a voice in our future arrangements. For himself, my grandfather wished to procure employment as a writer for some attorney or law stationer, and for me either a situation as governess or an engagement as day teacher. He had intended to advertise; but, as that was an expensive process, it seemed as well to make some inquiries before he ventured upon it. Therefore, when Jem returned from an errand, my grandfather desired him to inform Mr. Chaundy that he should be happy to see him; and that gentleman shortly made his appearance in a very shabby dressing-gown, having lost all trace of his profession with his dress. Before my grandfather had opened the subject, he turned to me and said, smiling:—

"I fancy I gained nothing in your good graces this morning when you so eloquently, though mutely, appealed to me on behalf of the poor Irish woman and her children. You could not understand from my blank look that I had taken especial note of the astonishment, and disgust, and pity, expressed in your own, and which was so natural in one new to the ways of the world. Circumstances compel one to be self-contained as an oyster. I had no money to give, and battling with the prejudices of those men, would have been idler than fighting the winds.

However, it was my sympathy with what you all seemed to feel that induced me to turn back, and accost you in the street."

After some further conversation on this subject, my grandfather spoke of his own affairs. Mr. Chaundy recommended that, instead of advertising, he should make personal application for himself, and try the register-offices for me.

"It may surprise you," he continued, "to know that there is in London a register-office for clergymen, at which I have now danced attendance for many years. What you saw this morning, what you may see any day in London, may lead you to suppose that no clergyman need be idle, and that is the fact. But monopoly on the one hand, and starvation on the other, makes our church system work badly. You see how I am lodged here, and the truth is, obtaining employment only makes matters worse. I was compelled to abscond from two curacies, and the one I have just given up was more than ever ruinous. I had eighty pounds a-year, upon which there were many claims, and a large vicarage-house on my hands. The incumbent, who has three or four livings, has a stall in your cathedral. Perhaps you know him—Archdeacon Dixon."

My grandfather acknowledged his acquaintance with this personage, and Mr. Chaundy went on:

"Very well. I unavoidably got into debt at the vicarage, and the Archdeacon himself preferred a claim against me which I could not meet. I determined to have an interview with him, and lay before him a plain statement of the case. You are possibly aware that he can bluster a good deal, and he contrived to throw all the blame upon me, by saying I had no right to accept the situation, knowing that I could not make it answer. The fact is, no curate can get on, or even exist, who has not property of his own. Our church management is a venal affair altogether, sir. Good God! it is terrible to pay so much for a mere helpless knowledge of all this selfishness and mismanagement, and the privilege of suffering under it without hope of change."

Mr. Chaundy, whose chief solace appeared to be smoking, having ascertained that, though my grandfather could not join him, none of us had any objection to the habit, took out of his pocket a short pipe, and puffing away at a great rate entered further into the details of his personal experience. This was continued night after night, and I compared all he said with what

I had heard from Uncle Stephen. It was no proof of Christianity *not* being a worn-out system that a few privileged and grasping churchmen contrived to make a good thing of it for themselves. Mr. Chaundy went further than this, expatiating on the different modes of preaching to different congregations (always with a large allowance to rich and respectable people), in a manner that took great hold of me. My high opinion of Uncle Stephen's integrity was strengthened by what I heard, which proved that he had at least good reason for speaking and thinking as he did; and my proud determination not to be crushed down by the mock humility of others went largely towards shaking the faith that had been wavering ever since my first contact with the world. It did not mend the matter that Mr. Chaundy admitted Christianity to be a glorious institution; that its doctrines produced a gracious influence on those who lived up to them: the fact that not one in a thousand did; that the law of this world governed the multitude; that Churchmen, even more than others, scrambled after its rewards, told fearfully against its universality, that one proof of a divine origin to which I had looked. I examined the evidence for and against in a cool, dispassionate manner, considering how much

I had anticipated that I had not found, and how keen was my conviction that upon the decision I came to depended my future success or failure in life.

I have learned since then that few girls of my age ever enter life with such absorbing thoughts of their chief interest in it. I had been peculiarly reared, in a solitude to which no evil ever came; I had been well grounded in the doctrine of Christ, and taught to believe that the oppression of which I read in books was an impossibility in our day; and my peculiar situation, with its consequent revelations, had produced a terrible revulsion of feeling when I first came in contact with the world, as suddenly as if I had dropped from the moon. I was too rudely awakened from my dream of universal brotherhood; I was quickly disgusted by an insincerity that was generally understood and allowed; and there was something in the temper of my mind that made me quite as ready to stand on the defensive as I had been willing to respond to the cordiality and affectionate interest and goodwill which I had so needlessly been prepared to meet.

My grandfather lost no time; but on the following day accompanied me to a register-office which was pointed out to us by Jem.

My name and qualifications, and the sort of situation I wished to obtain, were written down, and then, after glancing carelessly at me, and referring to a list, the office-keeper observed that such a place as I wanted was then vacant in Wimpole Street. It was as teacher to five young children. The lady, he said, was rather particular; having recently had three governesses upon trial, none of whom had suited; I might, however, be more fortunate. We thought so, too; and as personal application was to be made, between the hours of ten and twelve in the morning, we determined to proceed to Wimpole Street on the following day. After taking me home, my grandfather proceeded to the house of a law stationer, to whom he had a note of introduction from Mr. Chaundy; and Aunt Betsy declared her determination to apply for needlework, not being able, as I suspected, to find work for the employment of her time.

Never were people more resolutely bent upon labouring for daily bread, and it seemed impossible to fail in this object. I compassionated the Rev. Mr. Chaundy, of whose dingy apartment I that day obtained a passing glimpse, and wondered how he, with all the sensibility of an educated man, and all the refined tastes of a learned one, could so well endure the privation and obscurity to

which he was condemned, without hope to cheer him on, or sympathy to lighten the evils of his lot. In the course of the afternoon he sent me up a book to which he had made allusion the night before, and which I told him I had not read—"Don Quixote." Jem who brought it lingered as if he wished to say something; and I, to whom the study of human beings was newer and as yet more interesting than that of books, with which I was familiar, felt inclined to humour him. This man who looked so weather-beaten though not old, whose time seemed to be at the service of any or every body, who could be so respectful in the midst of his familiarity, so that there was nothing vulgar about him, uneducated vagabond as he evidently was, had already excited my interest; and wishful as I was to learn more of real life, I felt that even such a page as he could unfold to me would not be devoid of instruction.

"Do you live here?" I asked.

"Me!" he exclaimed, opening his eyes to the widest. "Well," he continued, "that's the right word, too; I do live here and nowheres else. I don't live in the cellar where I eat and sleep; I don't live in the streets where I work for them as wouldn't miss me if I dropped down dead this

very minute. I live here with Mister Chaundy, and nowheres else."

"You like Mr. Chaundy?"

"I should think I do! Look here,—there's nobody else cares for me. I serve a many, but none says to me as he does,—'Jem, my good fellow, I like to have your honest face about me; I don't feel quite alone in the world when I see you, Jem.' That's what I call *living* for him and me. You'd hardly think it now, and him one of the clergy."

"Are the clergy usually so different?"

"Lor' bless you, yes. So grand and mighty—there's no getting at 'em. He's the first clergyman as ever spoke to me—that's what makes me think the more of it. 'Jem,' he says to me, 'when people are prosperous they care for nothing but theirselves.' Now when I pray I ask the Lord to keep him as he is."

"Nay, that is selfish. You would surely like to see him rise in the world as he himself wishes to do. Besides, being so kind as you say he is, what a benefit his more extended usefulness would be to others."

"You don't understand how it is," said Jem, earnestly. "Prosperity spoils everybody; it would spoil him. If he was made a bishop on

to-morrow do you think he would know *me?* I should think not! That's where it is; I can't afford to lose him no way;—you see I've nobody but him to look to."

"Have you no wife or children?" asked Aunt Betsy.

"No: what should such as me do with 'em? I was nothing but a poor foundling that nobody owned. I'd just sense enough to keep my disgrace and poverty to myself."

His words pierced my spirit like a two-edged sword. This poor creature, so sensible of the disgrace of his birth, might teach me a lesson. I only owed it to the kindness of a few that I had not been altogether abandoned as he had been. I, too, ought to keep my disgrace to myself, and journey through the world alone.

"You see," continued Jem, "when I was young they used to send waggon-loads of children from the Foundling where I was, down to the factories. I was sent when I was seven years old, and a hard time I had of it, for the factories wasn't managed then as they are now. Bad usage, and bad living, and heavy work, made a cripple of me; and then they sent me to the Workhouse, where I wasn't treated much better. I ran away at last, and went to London. I begged money enough to buy a broom, and took to sweeping a

street crossing. Then I took to going errands, but I couldn't get a place for want of a character. One day—it's ten year ago now—I carried a box and a carpet bag for a gentleman as come by coach. As we was going along I saw a poor sick looking woman with a lot of ragged children. I set the trunk down and put my hand in my pocket and threw her some copper, and the gentleman turned round and said:—'What did you do that for? ain't you poor enough yourself without doing that?' So I says, 'Master, I suppose it's because I am so poor that I did do that! I'm poor enough to feel for them that's poorer than I am.' And he said that was quite right, and gave the woman some money hisself; and when he came to his lodgings he took me into his room and made me sit down and tell him all about myself; and then he said: 'Jem,' just as kindly as he does now, for it was Mister Chaundy,—'Jem,' says he, 'I think I can employ half your time if you like to serve me, and I'll buy you better clothes.' It wasn't the promise of the clothes or the regular work, though I liked both, but the kind words, that made me jump at his offer. Now we've been together ten years. Master's got poorer, and so have I, but that only makes us keep closer together. You see we couldn't get on without one another."

"But you seem to have a bad opinion of human nature, Jem," I said, "since you think that prosperity could make your master forget you. Do you feel that it would have the same effect upon yourself?"

"I shouldn't like either of us to be tempted," said Jem. "That's all I think about when I say, 'lead us not into temptation.' We're weaker than we think for, Miss; and I wouldn't like, either way, to lose the only friend as ever spoke a kind word to me."

I could readily understand how strong was this tie:—the only one who had spoken a kind word to him through a long life! And this bond of kindness, uniting two unfortunates, was it indeed so easily to be broken by the accidental elevation of one of them? Was this, one of the best aspects of humanity, only the result of a selfish necessity?

"You see, Miss," continued Jem; "it's all right with two people that's well off as long as both of 'em keep prosperous. Let one of 'em come down, and then it's all up. That's the way *they* part. Your rich folks won't have nothing to do with poor ones even when there's blood between 'em. Somehow, I shouldn't like to see you too high and mighty to say, 'Jem do this or that for me.' I took to all on you

when I saw you first, so did Mister Chaundy. That's where it is, you see; we don't often meet pleasant company, and we don't like to part with it."

"I am sure you will never find us too high and mighty to acknowledge that we are pleased with your good opinion," I said.

"Jem talks very sensibly, and I am glad you have heard him," said Aunt Betsy. "Your grandfather thinks too well of the world, and Uncle Stephen won't allow there's any good in it. What you have just heard is common sense. I'm much obliged to you for what you have said, Jem."

"Then, Missis and Miss Marples," said Jem, who had risen to go, and now held the door in his hand, "the next time you ask me where I *live* I shall say in this here room and down yonder in Mister Chaundy's, and nowhere else. Is there anything I can do just now?"

As there was not, Jem departed. I remembered in his favour that though in the regular course of his vocation he received payment for the conveyance of our goods, he had steadily refused any remuneration for the services he rendered us in the house. Not liking his "common sense" so well as Aunt Betsy did, I needed this evidence of his good faith before placing implicit confi-

dence in it. Instead of trusting the world too far, as Uncle Stephen had feared I should do, I was inclined to look with suspicion on the little actual good that came in my way. The truth was so forbidding in comparison with the error in which I had dwelt so many years, that I had little inclination to believe anything.

I was glad to turn to my book and forget this too real world in the pages of "Don Quixote." I yielded all my sympathies to this old knight, who was compelled by a restless energy of character to go forth and do something, and by a natural abhorrence of wrong to proclaim himself the champion of the oppressed. Honouring his motives, I did not see all the absurdity of his exploits, and I got angry with those who turned him and them into ridicule. So absorbed was I that I could scarcely listen to my grandfather when he returned to tell us that the person to whom he applied had no work for him at present, but would remember him at some future time.

Bless God for that power of forgetting self in others! so long as it is present with us we have no need to complain of the burden of life.

On the following morning, greatly annoyed at being compelled to attend to my own affairs, I accompanied my grandfather and Jem, who led

the way to Wimpole Street. As we went along my grandfather instructed me in what I should say; but, as I found afterwards, the main thing was overlooked by both of us.

Having arrived at the street, and found the number of the house, I left my two companions, and approached the door with some trepidation. My low, tremulous knock was answered by a shabby footman, who, when he understood my business, showed me into a back parlour while he went to announce my presence. He came back before I wished to see him, and asked me to walk up stairs. I followed him accordingly, and was ushered into a drawing-room in which two ladies were seated. My courage rose with the call upon it, and I curtsyed (an accomplishment, by the way, that Aunt Betsy had taught me) and walked forward, and looked these two, who might be the arbiters of my future destiny, in the face. The eldest lady was decidedly old. I only noted respecting her that her nose was rather disagreeably hooked, and that she wore a wig and a turban. The younger lady was stout and rather good-looking, but her voice was startlingly loud and coarse, and her manner dictatorial.

"I understand that you come about the governess's place," said the latter. "Sit down. I am very particular, as the register-office people

may have told you. I have found that very young people do not sufficiently consider the interest of their employers, and you seem very young: what age are you?"

I told her, and the old lady shook her head.

"That is very young indeed," said the loud-voiced lady, whom I understood to be the mistress of the house, Mrs. Wilton. "One can hardly imagine that you have completed your own education. What do you profess to teach?"

I underwent the disagreeable ordeal of enumerating my own accomplishments.

The old lady, who informed me that she was a Frenchwoman, then addressed me in her native language; and, after some conversation, professed herself to be well satisfied. Indeed, she paid me the compliment to say, that she had rarely met with an English person who could speak the language so well.

"That is satisfactory so far," said Mrs. Wilton. "Now with regard to music, you will, perhaps, play a little."

She opened the folding doors that led to the back drawing-room, in which stood a piano. I had more confidence in my musical powers than in any other: I had a natural taste, if not talent, that way; and, thanks to Uncle Stephen, I had

made some progress. I played until I was desired to stop.

"You play very creditably indeed," said Mrs. Wilton. "How about drawing?"

At my grandfather's suggestion I had taken some of my drawings with me, and these I now exhibited: they seemed to give satisfation.

"The great difficulty I have to contend with," said Mrs. Wilton, throwing herself upon a lounge, as if the very thought of it overcame her, "is the selfishness of those I have employed in this capacity. They all consider their own interest before mine, which creates a difficulty; and I do not know how to act. I have been compelled to adopt the plan of receiving governesses a month on trial, with no salary during the month. Of course, if I engage you, it will be necessary to acquaint your parents with my invariable system."

If a passing thought suggested to me that this "invariable system" had something to do with Mrs. Wilton's frequent change of governesses, I did not allow it to daunt me. I said that my grandfather would attend upon her, if she wished.

"Your grandfather?" she repeated; "are your parents dead?"

"My mother is dead," I replied.

"Your father is living, then. What is he?—what profession or trade, I mean; I am obliged to be particular about those I take into my house."

I had not been prepared for this question, and it upset me altogether. The truth was not to be told, and nothing in the shape of an equivoque occurred to me. Far stronger than any emotion of shame or distress was that of resentment against the man whom I was thus unexpectedly called upon to particularize and acknowledge. It seemed as if Providence, taking his part, permitted him, even unwittingly, to be the means of frustrating my efforts for self-help. My blood ran hot and cold during the full minute that I stood with downcast eyes, unable to frame a reply.

Doubtless the curiosity of the ladies had been aroused.

"What is your name?" inquired Mrs. Wilton.

"Margaret Marples."

"Your father's name is Marples?"

"No."

There was another pause, during which my interrogators might have exchanged significant glances.

"Were you brought up by your grandfather?"

"Yes."

"What is *his* calling?"

I had a keen consciousness that the truth would tell against me when I acknowledged that he had been a verger in —— Cathedral, and that at present he was in London seeking work for himself.

"And he brought you up so expensively! Did you say he had been dismissed from the cathedral?"

I had not said so, but I acknowledged this to be true.

"And how long have you been in London?"

"Only two days."

"This is extraordinary. Of course, you were aware that I should expect a most unexceptionable reference. You must be well known in ——?"

Here was another question that seemed unanswerable. It was odd that my grandfather had not even considered the possibility of such inquiries. My embarrassment was becoming too painful to be borne, and I determined by a bold effort to free myself at any price.

"My grandfather," I said, "was peculiarly situated at ——. Though no one could say anything against his character, I know that he had

few friends. Until I have spoken with him, I am not prepared to give a reference."

Upon glancing at the two ladies, I found that I had produced a thoroughly unfavourable impression. Mrs. Wilton spoke immediately.

"Upon second thoughts, I consider you too young to undertake so serious a charge," she said: "I am sorry that you have had this trouble. Good morning."

She rang the bell as she spoke; and understanding that I was dismissed, I returned the salutation and walked down-stairs, where the footman opened the street door for me. As Jem was still with us in the capacity of guide (for he had walked from the neighbourhood of Clerkenwell), I deferred what I chiefly had to say until we reached home, merely mentioning the objection to my youth. When we were alone, and I had given an account of all that passed, my grandfather was much distressed.

"I did think of all this," he said, "but not until you had entered the house; I ought to have accompanied you."

"And to what purpose would you have accompanied her?" said Aunt Betsy. "You yourself have no reference to give. All your life you have allowed the sins of others to crush you down, and except amongst the very poor, whose good

word would go for nothing, you have not a friend to help you in such a case as this. What I warned you of has come to pass, Thomas Marples."

"All along I have been in the Lord's hands," said my grandfather. "My trust in Him is unshaken, and to-night we will consult with Mr. Chaundy."

Throughout the worst of my troubles, I possessed the power of looking forward, or dashing them aside in the present. I never sat down to lament over them. On the present occasion, I returned with avidity to "Don Quixote." In the evening, when Mr. Chaundy joined us, I divided my attention betwixt the conversation and this absorbing book.

My grandfather acquainted him with the great difficulty that stood in my way.

"I begin to feel that in worldly matters, I am only a blind leader of the blind," he continued. "I have left myself helpless, for I have no right to expect any man to credit my partial account of the past. Neither do I wish to drag the past back for any purpose, yet it seems necessary in self-defence. You, sir, who have yourself known trouble, may understand how a man can be crushed down without exactly deserving it. Circumstances compelled me to bring up this child

in obscurity, so that she is less known in her native city than even here. Circumstances, too, over which I had no control, gave offence to the Dean and others, and led to my dismissal from a situation that I had held more than thirty years. My brother, the present mayor of ——, is wealthy: my poverty was a stumbling-block in his way, and he disowned me. I have not widened these breaches by showing resentment, and they are wide enough without that. If the Lord was not with us, our case would now be desperate."

"I can well believe," said Mr. Chaundy, "that you are more sinned against than sinning. But it is not well in this world to put up too tamely with what is unreasonable. A little pluck is necessary in these days, in which martyrdom may be perpetuated through a long life. We may go too far in not resisting evil."

"That is what I have said to my brother all along," said Aunt Betsy. "If *I* had been the man, we should not have been brought to this state."

"It is little that a man can do when his hands are tied, except trust in God," said my grandfather.

"The fact is," said Mr. Chaundy, lighting his pipe, and puffing away vehemently, "the fact is,

it is hard work steering a straight course through this world to the next. I find it a difficult matter myself. I do things that, upon mature deliberation, I cannot approve of,—what, under different circumstances, I would not do,—but I see no help. There is this advantage in a poor man steering wrong—the world will be sure to make such a noise about it that he may well afford to spare himself. I look upon this as a providential kind of defence, without which there would be no getting on. If I thought so hardly of myself as Archdeacon Dixon showed me I had need to do the other day, I might go and hang myself at once. As to wealthy relations, they are the greatest clog that a man in difficulty has, besides being of no use. They envelope us in an atmosphere of dark and bitter thoughts so that we cannot breathe freely. Altogether, sir, you may depend upon it that poverty in these days is a very ugly affair."

"We are all willing to work," said my grandfather. "We only ask to be allowed to live by our own labour."

"That is all that thousands have asked who people our workhouses, and madhouses, and prisons," said Mr. Chaundy. "The many are ground down for the few, in spite of the Christianity, the philanthropy, and liberty of which

England boasts. This I know to be the truth, because I have felt and seen it. Don't let me alarm you, however; and as to Miss Marples—refer to me;—Reverend Joseph Chaundy—that sounds well enough, if people are not too inquisitive, and you can address me at the Clerical Club. I can very conscientiously say all that any reasonable person would require."

We found reason, day by day, to think more highly of Mr. Chaundy. He entered warmly into our interests, advising and planning, and using his personal influence for my grandfather; attending to our daily convenience in conjunction with Jem; and in many ways doing his best to help and cheer us; so that we could not do otherwise than become attached to him. He continued to supply me with books, both French and English, and being himself a French scholar, we frequently conversed together in that language. The history of France had inspired me with a dislike of Frenchmen, which Mr. Chaundy first attempted to remove. He had no strong prejudice in favour of my own countrymen to battle with; the few I had come in contact with had chiefly excited my abhorrence; and the cold, hard, unapproachable, hurrying crowd of that great city only re-

minded me of Uncle Stephen's words—that all men were self-seekers, all worshippers of the visible god—Gold.

Little, too, as I had yet been in the streets, I had been struck by the general want of courtesy. No respect was paid to age or sex by that pushing, driving, self-absorbed multitude; and when, on two or three occasions, my grandfather and I were nearly knocked down, and then rudely told to keep out of the way, I said to myself, this, on a larger scale, is only what we have met with before—'Go out of my way,—trouble me not,—hinder me not,—we have nothing in common, even as fellow worms,—let me pass on!' This was what the great crowd said to me, and what men who held their heads above the crowd had said before. The chill of desolation struck to my heart in the midst of that populous city, in whose power, and magnificence, and pleasure we had no share, and from whose philanthropy, blazoned on many a dead wall, we hoped nothing. There was not a single individual in that mass of human beings to whom we could turn and say—'Brother, we are in affliction, and need sympathy; we are wronged, and want help.' I had extravagant notions, doubtless, but the extravagance to me was the apparent utter dearth of the commonest sym-

pathy that one might expect to find amongst a community of savages. All this reminded me of what Uncle Stephen had said—of what my grandfather had hoped in vain. No such vain seeker of the world's favour would I be: I was prepared to give indifference for indifference, contempt for contempt, hate for hate.

"You do the French injustice, so far as the working classes are concerned," said Mr. Chaundy to me one night. "The very audacity and fierceness of their occasional outbursts prove that there is noble stuff in them. The man of the blouse is never ashamed of his calling, which he knows to be honourable; he makes no struggle to rise above it, but takes his stand on the dignity of labour, boldly claiming for his class the high position which few dare outwardly dispute. This intrepid self-respect lifts the French artizan altogether out of vulgarity and servility. He is the thing he seems, and he is proud of what he is, and if he struggles, it is for his order, not for his individual self. Then, in addition to this feeling of dignity and independence, the very lowest class in France is characterized by a strong love for literature and art. Most of the workmen are familiar with the noblest writers of their country, —with Molière, Racine, Corneille; and the songs of Beranger fill the land. This is not the result

of outward circumstances; not merely because the education of the people has made greater progress in France than elsewhere; that free lectures on the different sciences are open in every quarter of Paris; that schools for drawing, music, and singing, may be attended free of expense; but primarily, because of a natural thirst for knowledge, and love of the noble and the beautiful in the people themselves. And this elevation of sentiment makes the people courteous;—not pityfully servile as we are to the rich and powerful, but courteous alike to all,—the poorest as well as the highest. In these respects, and they are important, the French are our superiors. They look with contempt upon our mean adulation of money without generosity or wit, and power without greatness; and ridicule our insane, sordid, vulgar scramble after respectability. In France men unite for a common object, whose glory is reflected upon all alike; in England men think alike, it is true, each one for his individual self, and this is not union."

Everything I heard and saw convinced me that I had much to learn—or unlearn. At present all my energies were to be directed to the means of procuring food, clothing, and shelter — those smallest yet most important wants of an ever-craving life. Something beyond these I needed

in order to live with satisfaction; I could not look forward with patience to a career of incessant abject drudgery; I was proud and disappointed, and thirsted for the power and the leisure to repel others and gratify myself; I had seen those I loved suffer wrong, and I burned to witness the humiliation of the oppressors. I had not yet begun to fear that I, who desired so much, should find it a hard matter to live from day to day. I was sufficiently easy in mind to note curiously many things that came under my observation. Our landlady belonged to the sect called Ranters, and on certain days in the week she had gatherings at the house, during which discourses were delivered and hymns sung. I had been down to pay the rent one evening, when several persons were assembled in the front parlour. A dark-complexioned, stern-looking man followed me into the passage, and placing his hand upon my shoulder, asked in a solemn tone, "What was the state of my soul?"

"Do *you* care about my soul?" I asked, rather abruptly.

"Don't you think the Lord Jesus teaches me to care for all souls?" said the man. "Don't I yearn over you as a brand that may be snatched from the burning,—as a lost sheep that may be brought into the fold? Come to the meeting

to-night, and let us rejoice over you as a dear sister."

Here was something like Christian communion. I thought I should like to go, merely to study these people more closely, but my grandfather had spoken against their errors, and I was not sure that I could obtain leave. I told the man I would consider about it, and he protested loudly against the danger of "considering" as I walked up-stairs. I repeated what I had heard, and, as I expected, my grandfather raised an objection.

"Let us cleave to our own church, and not be driven about by every wind of doctrine," he said. "If these people worship God in the spirit, so much the better for them; we can do the same without disgracing our own profession by departing from it."

"Yet these people preach Christ," I said. "It seems that our indifference and dislike to one another originates chiefly in this dividing of the church into sects."

"Didn't you find enough of indifference and dislike amongst Church people?" asked Aunt Betsy, sharply.

There was no denying this.

"For my part," she continued, "when I lived by myself I went mostly amongst the Methodists,

and liked them, though there's worldliness enough about them, too. They have no proud bishops and deans, too grand to trouble themselves with poor people."

My grandfather entered upon a lengthened defence of the church dignitaries, which was not concluded when Mr. Chaundy joined us. Aunt Betsy repeated to him my adventure in the passage, adding, "she says she should like to hear those people."

"You are inclined to be tolerant, I see," he said, turning towards me and smiling. "These men do an immense amount of good amongst the ignorant and the vicious, the thousands who never see the inside of a church, and who are only to be roused by the thundering declamation, the fierce threatenings, and rough though forcible appeals in which unlettered men excel. As to you, they might disgust you, especially if it happened to be what they call a 'love feast.' But the truth is, sir," he continued, turning to my grandfather, "our church would be none the worse if another John Wesley was raised up to rouse it from its spiritual apathy. We are too smooth and genteel to suit other than refined congregations, and a man's conscience may be French polished till no chance drop of grace can penetrate it. Truth is a rough customer after all,

and it is quite as well not to have that to find out at last, as is too often the case."

"I think I shall go down and hear these people myself," said Aunt Betsy, pausing in her knitting work. Their voices uniting in a psalm tune came clearly up to us.

"I should like to go with you," I said.

"Let her go, said Mr. Chaundy," seeing my grandfather about to object. "She is old enough and has sense enough to detect anything she finds wrong, and she has her aunt with her."

"There ought not to be anything wrong when people are worshipping God," said my grandfather. "Well, go."

Just as we were my aunt and I went down. We paused in the passage until the singing was concluded, and then knocked at the door, which was quickly opened. Without any one speaking a word, places were found for us, and we sat down on different benches. The room was filled with men and women, young and old, and I fancied that many of the females, like our landlady, had a most forbidding aspect. The same man I had encountered in the passage was elevated upon a box at one end of the room, and held a book in his hand, which he put down after we were seated, and commenced preaching. His vehement action and vociferous articulation startled me at first, and

then offended me, especially as I watched the deepening colour on his face, and saw a white foam gather about his mouth. If my conscience was not French polished, it was naturally too cold to agree with this red hot appeal to unconverted sinners. He certainly could not be accused of smoothness or gentility, as he gave utterance to a great deal of what sounded to me like gross abuse. Then there was no variety to atone for this, the discourse consisting chiefly of repetitions considered necessary for those who stood already on the brink of hell fire. If to me, however, these violent anathemas and exhortations appeared even impious, they evidently had a different effect upon those around me. The noise made by the preacher was heightened by exclamations on every side. Lost and altogether sunk in perdition, as they were represented to be, they seemed by their words and actions to be sensible of even greater unworthiness and peril. Beating their breasts, groaning, shouting, and, as in the case of the man who sat next me, scarcely seeming to know what they were about, the confusion became so oppressive, that I fairly wished myself out of it. The man I have alluded to as sitting next me, apparently in a paroxysm of overwrought feeling, had thrown his arm round my waist, and held me with so tight a grasp, that I could not extricate myself.

His excitement seemed so genuine, that on the score of his evidently not knowing what he was about, I was inclined to excuse the liberty, until I found that on becoming calmer he discovered no intention to release me, though he somewhat relaxed his grasp. When I put my hand to his, for the purpose of pushing it away, he gave my fingers a powerful squeeze, detaining them several minutes. In my distress I looked towards Aunt Betsy, who sat rigidly erect with her eyes fixed upon the preacher. If this was merely a demonstration of Christian love, which it might be, I could not help acknowledging a preference for the indifference to which I had been more accustomed. I did not, however, incline to such a belief, and viewing the man's conduct in the light of an impertinence, I desired him, in a low tone, to take his arm away.

"Oh, the love of them as knows they're all one in Christ!" exclaimed the man, giving me an additional squeeze. "Is there any on us as doesn't love one another?—is any on us in this room wicked to that ere degree?"

He spoke in a loud tone, as if he meant to be heard. Indeed the chief feature of the meeting was this privilege to speak, singly or altogether, as it happened; the preacher frequently enlarging on what was said, as he did now, until the demon-

strations of Christian affection became quite alarming. In the midst of my own trouble, heightened by an attempt to kiss me, which I frustrated by forcibly dashing my hand in my neighbour's face, I observed Aunt Betsy engaged in a brief struggle with a small, wizened, elderly man, who, on attempting to pay her a like compliment, found himself suddenly lifted from the ground, and dashed backward, to the great discomposure of the more peaceably inclined. In the midst of the confusion that ensued, my aunt strode forward, and seized my arm.

"I think you ought to be ashamed," she said, "calling yourselves Christians, and suffering such doings before young people! Let us pass out."

There seemed to be an attempt to stop us.

"What is our dear sister offended at?" exclaimed the preacher; "or is she *not* a dear sister? Is there no Christian love in her?"

"No, there isn't," said Aunt Betsy, sharply, "nor in you either, nor in any of you. I consider these doings quite scandalous, and I am sorry I brought my niece here."

"I hope you don't mean to say anything scandalous about my house," said Mrs. Dent, our landlady, here showing her sour visage. "I've kept house here thirty years and never had anything against my character."

"It would speak better for your character if you would show a little more civility from day to day instead of bursting upon us all at once in this boisterous manner," said Aunt Betsy. "You stand out of the way there, and let us go out!"

The preacher again raised his voice, but we managed to get away and left him speaking. My aunt took no pains to conceal her indignation as she entered our room adjusting her cap. As for me, I dare say my face was all in a flame, and my angry excitement had taken away my breath.

"The meeting has been a failure, I see," said Mr. Chaundy, smiling.

"I am sure I never saw anything so shameful in my life," said Aunt Betsy, indignantly. "There was the whole set of them suddenly falling to kissing and embracing one another—and this child amongst them! I saw some fellow kissing you, Margaret."

The shame, and indignation, and annoyance, united with this exposure, was more than I could bear, and I burst into tears.

"Come to me, my poor child!" said my grandfather: "I said you ought not to go."

I leaned my head, sobbing, on my grandfather's shoulder; and then it suddenly occurred to me

that I was making myself ridiculous, and I looked up and dashed away my tears.

"I am sure you did not see any one kiss me, Aunt Betsy," I said. "I struck the man who sat next me in the face just as you knocked down the little old man who made a like attempt with yourself; and I am afraid I hurt him, for when we came out he was holding his hand before his eyes."

Mr. Chaundy laughed long and loudly. "We talk a deal about Christian love and fellowship," he said, "without seeming able to come to a right understanding about it. At one time our tender concern for men's souls led us to torture and burn their bodies, and I don't know if that was not better than what you have seen to-night. We that are old have an uncomfortable consciousness that the young are doomed to disappointment. We have been disappointed ourselves, and a long life shows us no remedy for life's evils."

My grandfather denied this position, and declared God's grace to be sufficient for a probationary existence. As I watched Mr. Chaundy, puffing away at his pipe without answering, I was impressed, as I had been before, with the belief that he, Churchman as he was, had not found a refuge from dissatisfaction in this doctrine.

"Jem," said my grandfather, addressing that personage on the previous Saturday, "what church does Mr. Chaundy attend?"

"Lor', bless you!" said Jem, "he never attends no church when he hasn't got to preach; what should he for, when he be chock full o' sermons hisself? He don't go to church in a ordinary way, nor me neither."

"Does he not tell you that you ought to go?"

"Lor', no! Mister Chaundy sometimes preaches in these here churches when the curates wants a holiday, and then I goes, in course; but in a general way he says to me, 'Jem,' says he, 'you do as you like about it: for I'm not quite sure that going to church won't spile you!"

This, and similar testimony, made my grandfather distrustful of Mr. Chaundy, who was, nevertheless, the only friend we had, and a good friend too — better than any we had found amongst the high churchmen at ——; better than any we were likely to find amongst the "Ranters." He reminded me of Uncle Stephen, who helped us quietly and unobtrusively, and without parading his own generosity, or the godliness which, if it becomes disgusting to us, must be unendurable to the Searcher of all

hearts. For my part, I was thankful that we had met with a man who seemed better inclined to act well than to sermonise or dictate.

We had now been a fortnight in London and found nothing to do. I understood, rather from my grandfather's looks than from anything he said, that our small means were dwindling away in the meantime. The register-office people had not as yet heard of anything that would suit me, and my grandfather's application to the law-stationers and attorneys had produced nothing. Aunt Betsy seemed very equable under all this until one day, when my grandfather was out, she thus addressed me.

"It's of no use going on in this way, Margaret, because it can't last, and we mustn't expect to live in idleness. If I could have got sewing work you might have helped me rather than do nothing, but I have tried hard and I can't. You heard what Mr. Chaundy said the other night about the French considering all labour honourable:—that's just what I think myself. Let me live by the work of my hands without being a burden upon anybody and I shall be satisfied. I shall go out to wash, or do any other hard work that I can get. Don't mention it till I have tried; but this is what I mean to do, and thank God that I have health and strength for it."

Aunt Betsy's resolution showed me at once all the peril of our situation. The great agony to me was the knowledge that I had been the main cause of this distress. My proud, indignant feelings, and the great things I wanted to do, crumbled to nothing. I was brought down to a craving and praying for work,—any sort of drudgery by which I might avert the utter destitution that lay before us. And Aunt Betsy, strong in her principles and resolute about putting them into practice, was the first amongst us to obtain employment. A few nights after the above conversation she again spoke out as we were retiring to rest.

"I have got a place, Margaret," she said; "that is, I have got work as a charwoman. To-morrow morning I shall be up and away before daylight. That queer creature, Jem, recommended me: so you see how little patronage is needed to enable one to live."

Though I had expected this, my very soul quivered at the reality. My heart struggled with a mighty pang.

"O God!" I said, "my dear, poor aunt, if I could only save you from this!"

"From what, you silly child?" said Aunt Betsy. "What have I done but work all my life? And it does me good; if you want to

kill me keep me idle. Just listen to me, your grandfather knows all about it, for I told him to-day. Thank God, you know all sorts of housework, so he won't be lost; and whatever you do keep your spirits up—don't let him see that you are cast down—don't *be* cast down; recollect that you are young and strong, and that he is old and infirm. And now be a good child and go to sleep."

For the first time that I could remember Aunt Betsy kissed me, and I soon understood from her regular breathing that she slept. I could not help marvelling and reproaching myself more than ever for having often thought unkindly of her. Her character shone out in adversity: she uttered no reproaches, as she well might have done: and her affection for myself was most exhibited when I stood in most need of it. Her mind was better regulated than mine, if less polished: I envied the calm slumber into which she had fallen, whilst I lay tossed on a sea of troubled thoughts, unable for hours to still the uselessly busy heart and brain, until towards morning, I fell into a heavy sleep, from which I was awakened by Aunt Betsy getting up in the dark.

"Are you awake?" she said, hearing me stir.

"Yes, aunt."

"Try to sleep again. I shall be back at eight or nine o'clock to-night, perhaps sooner. Come, this is a good beginning; one of us has got work. By-and-by we shall all do better."

She kissed me again before leaving the room. A few real, hot, heart-wrung tears gushed from my eyes as I heard her descending the stairs. Listening intently I soon understood that she could not open the street-door. Then I heard her tapping at the door of the back parlour, in which our landlady and her daughter slept; and then again there was a small war of words, and I distinctly heard Mrs. Dent say—"What makes you want to go out at this time of the morning, Mrs. Marples?" I did not catch the reply though I had advanced to the top landing in my night-dress; the outer door was opened and slammed to again with a great noise.

I crept back into the room, but not to bed. I struck a light and dressed myself, and set about such work as I could find; for I had a deal of Aunt Betsy's restiveness under inactivity, and I found bitter thoughts a bad accompaniment to idleness. My dislike to our landlady had, since the night we attended the meeting, been mixed with some fear of her. Her always peevish and unfriendly look had since then portended something worse than usual, and with all her pre-

tended sanctity she seemed the very sort of person likely to harbour malice. Her cold, formal, repulsive manner, though disagreeable enough, mattered little so long as we could pay the rent of her rooms; but I shivered from head to foot, like a leaf, at the thought of owing her anything. Then, I knew enough of the world to be assured that when she came to understand what took my aunt out so early, she would take advantage of the knowledge and our evident poverty. An intuitive sense of the nobleness of Mr. Chaundy's nature forbade any such apprehension in his case, but the false shame, from which none are free, made me look for our next interview with anxiety —and an internal shrinking from I knew not what; for I had sense enough to know that Aunt Betsy had done rightly and nobly,—sense enough to feel proud of her, and to love her better than I had ever done before. And this was with me no mere sentimentalising about what I conceived to be just; for I had already resolved to join Aunt Betsy in her labour if no better might be. I had the sort of pride that would not endure others drudging for me as I would not drudge for them or myself; and at heart the shackles of this world's opinion hung loosely about me; I could shake them at will—by a strong effort I knew that I could cast them from me altogether.

As if he had divined all I thought and felt, Mr. Chaundy greeted us at night with more than his usual cordiality. He made no secret of missing Aunt Betsy, but spake at once of her absence, and the occasion of it; and, seeming to understand that our necessities were more urgent than he had supposed, he entered into the subject, and wandered to no other.

"It is a beautiful thing," he said, drawing his chair to the fire and taking out his pipe, "to consider how bold and earnest a spirit God has given us wherewith to battle with the difficulties of life. The very belief in this spirit is worth half the homilies that were ever preached. Never mind that vulgarity frequently starts out of its path in needless fear of contamination; that indolence at all times shudders to contemplate it; for the reward of resolution is two-fold, enabling us to laugh at the squeamishness at the same time that we escape the worst tyranny of the world. No one has started at shadows more than I have done through life, and it is often the fate of such as me to be curst with a lively sense of their own folly. We addict ourselves to one pursuit; we prepare ourselves for it, and, not meeting with the success we anticipated, we give up the game of life like poltroons. We become cowardly for others as well as for ourselves; we

are diseased, and we shrink from the efforts of a vigorous spirit as a consumptive patient shrinks from the blast of winter. There is a look of determination about you, Miss Marples, that struck me at first as like something in your aunt's countenance and manner, though there all resemblance ends. Like her, I dare say you would not mind making a beginning at anything that might at least be made useful as a stepping-stone. In short, I know of a place that, though it would not suit any one very particular, might be made something of in your hands."

I expressed my eager wish to take a situation of any description.

"I will tell you all the truth about it," said Mr. Chaundy. "Whilst preaching several times at a neighbouring church, I received occasional invitations to dine with the family of a tradesman. I have seen a good deal of them at different times, and have not been impressed in their favour. The tradesman himself is a grocer, in a large way, and what is called a thorough man of the world. His wife is an uneducated woman, who might be respectable, but who makes herself vulgar and disagreeable by aping the fine lady, and striving after gentility as the one great good of existence. The children, and there is a swarm of them, are what might be expected from such a

bringing up,—self-confident, rude, and ignorant. Some of them have finished their education; and for the rest, Mrs. Brown thinks it would be cheaper, as well as more genteel, to employ a governess at home. I, who am looked upon in the light of a respectable acquaintance, have been consulted on this matter. Now it went against my conscience to recommend you to this place, but if you have courage to try your best, I dare say I could procure it for you. At all events, my recommendation would in that quarter be sufficient."

He had said nothing to daunt me, and I was sufficiently conscious that I could not afford to be too particular. I expressed my willingness to go, and thanked him.

"There are a few difficulties in the way that we may be able to stare down," he continued. "Mrs. Brown has no respect for talent, seeing that it may hired and cheapened, and kept in a subordinate state. If we could manage by any means to bring in the fact that your great-uncle is mayor of ———, it would benefit you very materially."

My grandfather shook his head, and I protested against such a possibility eagerly. "I know nothing of him," I said; "I never even saw him; it is quite impossible."

"Well, under all the circumstances of the case, it wouldn't do. She would boast of his acquaintance, ask an introduction to him, and want to know how often you corresponded. This is one side of the question; now for the other: it is not adviseable she should understand that your circumstances are particularly depressed, or that it should come to her knowledge that your aunt is compelled to labour in a menial capacity. Without knowing this, she would be sufficiently inclined to keep you down; knowing it, she would be insolent."

"Christ did not teach that poverty was a crime," said my grandfather.

"My dear sir, his teaching avails us little with the world. Poverty is popularly considered to be a crime; it is legally punishable in many ways. But crime is not the proper word; the general idea about poverty is, that it is some loathsome and disfiguring kind of leprosy, that it would be an abomination to touch. For this reason we lodge our robbers and murderers better than we do our paupers, and our sympathies are more readily aroused for the former than the latter. The fact is, deny it as we will, money-worship has become the popular creed in England."

This belief, in a minister of the church, agreed with all that Uncle Stephen had said. I longed

to talk to him about that kind friend whom I felt we had used ill. I received readily these doctrines that led my heart farther from God.

"I should not like my child to enter a family so little under the influence of Christian principles as the one you describe," said my grandfather. "She has been brought up piously, and I would have good example kept before her eyes."

"That feeling is perfectly right and natural," said Mr. Chaundy; "but searching for a correct Christian family would be like looking for a needle in a bundle of hay. We must take people as we find them; if we are properly taught, their very errors will give us light."

I was eager to enter upon this situation, and my grandfather at length consented that I should try it. There was no need of Mrs. Brown knowing anything about Aunt Betsy, who, in the event of my grandfather and myself obtaining employment, might remain at home. This, then, was decided upon, and Mr. Chaundy promised to speak to the Browns the following day.

Aunt Betsy came home tired, but in good spirits. She had earned her food and eighteen pence; and if she had found anything to complain of, she did not mention it. She heard of my prospects with pleasure, and perfectly acquiesced

in the propriety of keeping herself in the background. Understanding the world far better than my grandfather did, there was no surprising her; and she submitted to whatever was disagreeable or revolting as a matter of course.

With feelings altogether embittered and faith-shaken, I prepared myself to go out into the world. I shrank a little from the inevitable that lay before me. I hated hypocrisy; I was inclined to be fair and open; and where I was going, I could only expect to hate and be hated, and to parry the injustice of others as well as I could. I was determined to do my duty; I might thus satisfy selfishness, and, at all events, I should feel that I was not a real burden upon any one.

Aunt Betsy left us at the same hour on the following morning. I had occasion to go out in the course of the day, and upon returning I encountered, in the passage, the man who had so annoyed me on the night of the meeting. He was a mean-looking individual, about thirty years of age; his pale, lank hair had a faded look, and was matched by bristly white eyelashes, and his glassy blue eyes and large teeth projected. Altogether he had a most repulsive look, because the general expression of his face indicated low cunning, and much ready, if well-concealed,

ferocity. I shivered from head to foot when he seized my arm and held me so fast that I could not get away.

"Come, now," he said, in a hideous whisper, "don't be so shy; what's the need on it? Lor', what nice eyes yourn is! I say! I didn't come arter the preaching that ere night; I come arter the gals, as allays likes to be hugged; and since I seen you I aint thought o' none on 'em. I came a purpose to see you, so do be kind to a poor feller as has got his 'art damaged, and no mistake. Hush! don't be arter screeching in that how."

Finding that to struggle was of no use, I called aloud upon our landlady, who made her appearance from the parlour. The man immediately released me, and sauntered away as if nothing was the matter.

"Well, what's to do now, Miss Marples?" said Mrs. Dent, looking particularly grim and sour.

"I have been insulted by the man who has just gone away, and I wished you to speak to him."

"Insulted!" repeated Mrs. Dent, in a taunting tone; "I don't see why you should be so high and mighty, that you're not to be spoken to! That's a very respectable young man; and

as to anything he could say to you, you needn't frighten yourself, for he's as good as engaged to my daughter. And if we're not good enough for you, Miss Marples, you're not good enough for us, and that's the long and the short of it. I've always kept my house respectable; we're not used to lodge charwomen and such like; so, if you'll be good enough to let your grandfather know that the rooms is wanted, I shall take it as a faviour."

The mingled insolence and freezing civility of this speech told well upon me. Here was a sample of what I was to expect from the world. My grandfather was out: he had gone by appointment to the house of the law-stationer, to whom he had been recommended by Mr. Chaundy, and I expected that he would bring back work. This hope, and the forlorn one that lay before myself, had slightly exhilirated my spirits, and I was ashamed at feeling how easy it was to cast me down again. Casting down it was not exactly, for I had no height to fall from; it was a sudden freezing of the blood that had just begun to flow a little more freely. Indeed, with respect to that freezing of the blood, which soon gave me a general statue-like sensation, I was rather indebted to it than otherwise, even at that early stage of my experience, as the numbness

seized me altogether, and deadened the sense of feeling. It was the result of a scorn that was mightier than anger,—a pride that triumphed over grief.

As yet I was only a beginner; and I certainly felt more on that occasion than I did afterwards under far more trying circumstances. I was sorry to be compelled to repeat to Aunt Betsy and my grandfather the substance of what I had heard, and I was not sure that we had the means left for paying our rent and going away.

My grandfather returned in good spirits, for he had obtained employment. I told him at once the bare fact that we must quit the rooms, as our landlady said she wanted them.

"How very strange!" said my grandfather. "We have paid the rent; did she mention any objection to us as lodgers?"

I had dreaded this question, and I answered it.

"Very well," said my grandfather, quietly, "perhaps we shall be more comfortable elsewhere. Don't be troubled about this, child; we have done nothing wrong, and whilst our means last we can be independent."

I felt somewhat reassured. On the whole, I was inclined to be thankful that I should not have to leave my relations in the hands of Mrs. Dent.

They would not remove to any great distance, and Mr. Chaundy could still visit them. When that gentleman came in rather late to tell us that he had spoken to the Browns, and that he had promised I should call upon them the next morning, my grandfather informed him that we had received notice to quit the house.

"Why?" inquired Mr. Chaundy; "what does the woman mean—what did she say?"

"I don't mind you knowing, Mr. Chaundy," said Aunt Betsy, who had returned home. "She objects to me because I employ myself at such work as I can get. I am not respectable enough for her."

Mr. Chaundy had not sat down, saying he had no time to stop; perhaps he feared interrupting my grandfather who had been writing all the evening. Now, however, he sat down and commenced smoking.

"This curse pursues one from the lowest class to the highest," he said,—"this eternal craving for gentility. None inquire after worth, and the consequence is, that few care about it. This woman began life as a servant. Her husband was, in his lifetime, a porter in the city: now she gets her livelihood by letting lodgings, and she and her daughter clean feathers and furs for the shops. Yet for all this, and notwithstanding her

pretensions to piety, you see she cannot tolerate anything that is not respectable. How can a poor ignorant woman who has seen nothing better all her life, help it? We have our respectable churches to which poverty and shabbiness are not admitted; these are filled by fashionable congregations who have a fashionable preacher, a man of family, to match. As to our city churches, I once heard an alderman's wife observe that she considered the irreligion of the very poor a great blessing, quite a providential circumstance, as their presence in the church in large numbers would not only be unwholesome but so very disreputable. The feeling, my friends, is universal, at least in this 'nation of shopkeepers,' and there is nothing for it but to submit with a good grace."

"In France it is not so," I said, unconscious that I was thinking aloud.

"Nor anywhere else," said Mr. Chaundy, "except it be in America. That 'finest nation on the face of the earth' apes us too closely to admit of its setting a noble example in this matter. Yet the Americans may laugh at our toleration of negroes,—we that will not tolerate our own poor."

"Some day I shall go to France," I said. This wish or determination had occupied my mind for some time. As one of the people, I

longed to find myself in a land where I could lift up my head for what I was: it was loathsome to think of the pretence ready on every side to crush me down for the accidental disadvantages of birth and position.

"You must not forget, Margaret," said my grandfather, "that France is chiefly peopled by papists and infidels. Do not indulge in dreams of finding substantial good in such a place."

I was on the point of saying,—"I don't care what they are so they be unlike the people around me here," but I checked myself and remained silent. I felt, however, that I could no longer be taught by my grandfather; the world had taken that power of God out of his hands.

CHAPTER VI.

On the following morning Aunt Betsy remained at home, and at ten o'clock I was prepared to call on Mrs. Brown. Jem walked with me to show the way. It was a very crowded, bustling neighbourhood, and the crowd, as usual, elbowed its way after an independent fashion, that rendered it necessary for every individual to look after him or her self. This unceremonious jostling in the streets, where a lord would stand as little chance as any one else, seems a contradiction to the state of the case upon closer inspection. This show of rude liberty which allows the ignorant, the arrogant, and the vicious, a wide license, and which wants the restraint of national good manners, is not at all incompatible with the real slavery that fetters society at the heart's core. As we passed along, two scavengers were filling a cart with

street refuse. One of them (I thought intentionally, and I narrowly escaped with a small sprinkling of mud myself) contrived to bespatter a very dandified young man who was picking his way with a spruce cane in his hand. A roar of laughter, in which Jem joined, saluted this personage as he turned round with an inflamed face to demand an explanation.

"It was a haccident," said the scavenger; "yer should keep out o' the way."

I passed on and left them disputing. This seemed to me very like an ebullition of poverty's dislike to its natural enemy—gentility. I only pretend to speak of English manners and habits as a stranger and a sojourner in the country for a short period,—to give faithfully the results of my own experience. It may not be altogether true that the streets of London are unfit for a decent female to pass through, but that was my impression to the last. I felt thankful on this occasion when Jem at length informed me that we stood before Mr. Brown's shop.

It was a large, warehouse-like place with four stories rising above the lower basement. Jem led me down a passage, where he pointed out the private door, and saying he would wait my return, left me. My knock was answered by a boy in an apron, who led me to the foot of a large stair-

case, and pulled a bell-rope, that sent a clanging peal through the house. A maid-servant presently made her appearance, and learning my name, she desired me to follow her up-stairs. She introduced me to a large sitting-room looking backward, where I found Mrs. Brown.

Mrs. Brown was tall and stout, with a large florid face, enlivened by very light hair. Like Mrs. Wilton, her voice was masculine, but that I attributed to a habit in both of speaking louder and more confidently than seemed necessary for ordinary purposes and from hour to hour.

"So you're the young—person as Mr. Chandy recommended for the governess sitiation. Set you down. Mr. Chandy is a friend of ourn, as I suppose you know," and I thought she tossed her head a little. "He tells me as you're a horphen, and that suits me very well, as raly we've such a large family and such a circle of acquaintance as we can't well do with no more people about the house. I understand as you can teach music and French?"

I replied that I believed I could.

"Raal good French now is it? I think I could tell;—will you talk a bit?"

I repeated a rather long passage from a work of Chateaubriand's, which Uncle Stephen had given me, and which I liked very much.

"Well, that sounds nice, and like raal French," said Mrs. Brown. "I'm not quite ignorant of them matters you see. My daughter's larned French at a boarding-school, and you can touch her up a bit. I want all my children to larn French and music. Now, what do *you* want?"

This was addressed to five young urchins, girls and boys, who first peeped in at the door, and then entered the room in a scamper.

"Don't come here, scrowdging in that way!" said Mrs. Brown. "Where's your manners? Louisa Caroline, take your fingers out of your mouth. Hubert Adolphus, if you sit stroddling in that chair I'll call your par up. Now, one on you go and call Miss Brown here."

"I sha'n't," said Hubert Adolphus, who retained his position on the chair.

"Nor me neither," said a girl of about seven; "she's a nasty thing—she's been slapping me."

"And served you right, I dare say," said Mrs. Brown. "Leonora will go for mar,—she's mar's pet."

"Nay," says Leonora, shaking herself, and looking askance at me.

"Well, I never!" ejaculated Mrs. Brown. "They're such hindependent children as never was seen. But I'll tell your par of you."

She advanced to the door herself, and called

out the name "Matilda Jane," and presently a young lady some years older than myself, very thin and sickly looking, with a large nose and dark hair plaited very elaborately, made her appearance.

"Law, mar," she said, "what do you want now?"

"This is the governess as I'm going to hire," said Mrs. Brown, "and I want you to talk French with her. Mr. Chandy says she talks it very well."

The young lady eyed me from head to foot in a very contemptuous manner. I addressed her in a short sentence of French.

"That's not the way I've been used to speak it," she said, "and I could talk very well at Miss Bennet's. I'm not going to begin again, and that's the long and the short of it, Ma."

"I expects you'll do as you're bid," said Mrs. Brown, showing more spirit with this young lady than she had done with the younger children. "Now, go your ways, and mind what I say to you." The young lady departed with a very defiant air.

"Now, Miss—I forget your name—oh, yes! Marples; you understand," said Mrs. Brown, smoothing down an extraordinary morning dress —a faded and rather greasy red silk one—"as I

want my children to larn music and French; I likes to hire people by the month, and then if they don't suit, we can make short work of it. You'll have board and lodging and twelve pound a-year if you like to take it. Washing won't cost you much if you wear dark dresses. What do you say?"

Wishing, above all things, to cease being a burden on my grandfather, I considered this offer rather magnificent. I had a good stock of clothes to begin with, and, as Mrs. Brown said, washing would not cost me much; I closed with her offer at once.

"I believe," I said, "Mr. Chaundy informed you that I had a grandfather, whom I should sometimes like to see."

"Oh, yes; he did say you'd a grandfather. Well, in course you can go to see him—suiting my convenance."

With this understanding I promised to come for good on the following day. My grandfather and Aunt Betsy considered this very well for a beginning, but Mr. Chaundy was highly indignant at the terms.

"This woman is putting upon you shamefully," he said, "but I see no help for it just now. Well, we will try to look out for something better."

Aunt Betsy insisted on doing my washing. Jem could take my clothes to and fro, and this was decided upon. On the following morning I took leave of my grandfather, Aunt Betsy, and Mr. Chaundy, the former shedding tears; and followed by Jem, who carried my box upon his truck, I set out for Mrs. Brown's.

I was introduced to a large, naked-looking room on the second floor, which the children usually occupied. On a small cushioned arm-chair, placed near the fire-place, sat a deformed girl, who looked much older than her actual age—fourteen. She was the sole occupant of the room when I entered it with Mrs. Brown.

"The children's got a holiday to-day," said that lady; "you know its Christmas time, and they looks for it. They're gone to Grinnidge with a party, and won't be home till night. You can keep Meely company; and I dare say you can sew well. I've some things as want furbishing up, and I dares say you'll make something of 'em."

I expressed my willingness to try, and Mrs. Brown brought me a silk dress to pick to pieces and turn. She then left the room, and I sat down to my work.

The deformed girl, who had not spoken a word, continued looking at me with her hollow eyes.

Her features were unnaturally sharpened, but I saw her resemblance to the rest of the children. All had the large nose, and sallow complexion, and dark hair of Mr. Brown.

"Is your name Amelia?" I asked, "wishing to draw her into conversation.

"Amelia Nanetta Charlotte," she replied. "Isn't it a fine name for such as me?"

"Names do not signify much," I said, "and I do not see why you should not have a fine name as well as any one else."

"That's all gammon," said Amelia. "I'm not to be gammoned."

"What?"

"Don't you know what gammon is? Law, don't tell me!"

I positively heard the word for the first time, but I had a dim perception of its meaning.

"I speak in all sincerity," I said. "You must be lonely up here. Do you ever go out?"

"No, nobody offers to take me, and I wouldn't go if they did. They're always telling me I'm ugly and a fright; they're ashamed of me and I'm ashamed of myself. What should I go out for?"

This was one of the afflictions of earth of which I had never dreamed. No love in the very heart of home—no hope beyond it—no satisfaction in self.

"Do you like reading?"

"No, I don't. I like to sit quiet by myself, and hate everybody."

"But that is sinful."

"How do you know what's sinful? Isn't it sinful for them to go to church and come back to make game of me? They bring me tracts, too, and I burn 'em."

I did not know how to deal with this singular creature, humpbacked and ricketty, with a small, swollen, helpless body, and malice gleaming out of her bright black eyes.

"You think yourself handsome, I suppose?" she said, after a pause.

"Do you think so?"

"Oh, you fancy yourself sharp! Now you've gone and tore mar's gownd, and she'll make a piece of work."

I *had* unluckily torn the gown, which was rotten. What sharp eyes the creature had!

"You think you're come here to be comfortable, don't you? Ho! ho! ho!" she said, shortly.

"Why should I not be comfortable?"

"Are you used to be snubbed? I'll tell you what—our children are little devils: don't I hate the sight of 'em! Mar cares for nothing but herself. You should hear our housemaid stuff her up

about looking young. She and Matilda Jane are always quarreling. I know why: mother's jealous of her. Then there's Francis James—have you seen *him?*"

"One of the little boys?"

"Law, I wish he could hear you! Francis James is the biggest man in London, according to his thinking. Mar likes him for all that, because she thinks him stylish, and he tells her he gets into fashionable company. Par quarrels with him because he won't work, and he quarrels with par because he can't get enough money to spend. Mar helps him to rob the till, and some of these days they'll be saying Tony did it; and I wish they would. I hate Tony."

"Hush, for heaven's sake!" I said.

"Oh, you're frightened, are you? I thought I could frighten you. There's uglier things than me in this house."

It is needless to pursue the conversation held through the long day with this being, singularly deformed in mind as well as body. Shrewd and observing, and evidently at war with everybody, it was quite horrifying to listen to her anecdotes of the meanness, the hypocrisy, and the depravity altogether of her family and their acquaintances; and ill as I was myself inclined to think of the

human nature about me, I found myself instinctively taking up the gauntlet in its defence.

In my grandfather's home we had always been accustomed to celebrate Christmas as a holy time; and I was familiar with the festivities peculiar to the season in old days; but the reality of merry-making, as I witnessed it in Mrs. Brown's house, was something quite new to me. As Twelfth Night occurred a few days after my instalment there, and as Mrs. Brown had issued invitations for a juvenile ball, my setting about teaching the children was at present out of the question. Indeed Miss Brown, indifferent about my presence when she said it, expressed her wonder at mar boring them with a governess in the midst of the holidays. But Mrs. Brown knew what she was about; and finding, as she expected, that I could sew well, and that I had some taste in fashioning dress, found me full employment from morning until late at night. When I had finished turning her dress, which she said was good enough for a juvenile party, I had to hurry through some alterations in the children's frocks. In the course of three days I began to wonder how I should ever obtain sufficient authority over my unruly pupils to do any good with them. They so evidently considered me in the light of an in-

ferior, and took so many liberties with me already, snatching my work out of my hands, suddenly jerking my chair away when I attempted to sit down, throwing tea in my face during that meal, and so on, that I might well despair. My annoyance and ineffectual remonstrances afforded huge delight to Miss Amelia, who declared that having a governess in the house would be good fun all the year round.

On the morning of Twelfth-day, as I acknowledged I understood ironing pretty well, Mrs. Brown said she should take it as a "faviour" if I would release Mary from that work, there being plenty else for her to do. So I descended to a back parlour, dark, from its situation, at all times, and now lighted by gas. I had to pass to and fro, to fetch my irons from the fire in the kitchen, where three servants and a charwoman were busily engaged. Through the open door of the room I was in I heard everything that passed, and I could not but marvel at the volubility of these women, who kept up an incessant conversation, literally, as it seemed to me, about nothing. Presently I heard a shrill scream, and Mary, the nursemaid, cried out:

"Now you leave me alone, Tony; you'd best, or I'll call missis."

"What a fuss the gals make, and where's the

use on it?" said a voice I recognized instantly as that of my tormentor at the Meeting. "Don't I know as all the gals likes to be kissed?"

"Not by such a fool as you," said Mary; "so keep your hands to yerself."

"I say, Sally," said Tony, "nice gal that new governess, ain't she?"

I heard the word "hush!" and then a smothered conversation was carried on. This discovery, that I was in the same house with so hideous a hypocrite, distressed me exceedingly, especially when I reflected that he might do me great disservice by telling more about my family than I wished the Browns to know. I did not anticipate anything worse, or that I should have any difficulty about keeping him at a distance.

I was absorbed by these unpleasant thoughts, when suddenly I felt two huge hands placed at either side of my face, which was wrenched round and brought into close contact with that of Tony himself, looking more hideous than ever, as there was a malicious grin on his countenance. In the horror and exasperation of the moment I struck him over the mouth with the hot iron.

"Damn your imperance!" he exclaimed, re-

treating at once, and putting his hand to his mouth. "This is twice you've served me that how. Who the devil are you as you mayn't be touched, I should like for to know? Who was turned out of their lodgings 'cause they was a disgrace to the house? Mind if I don't serve you out."

"Do what you like," I said, breathless with irritation, "but take yourself out of this room at once, and do not repeat your liberties with me. Are you going, or must I go?"

"Law, what a spitfire you are!" said the man, but retreating backwards as he spoke. "See if I don't get you under the misletoe to-night."

He disappeared, and I continued my work with trembling hands. At the very outset it seemed probable that I should either be turned out of the place or be compelled to leave it on my own account. I had not calculated all the miseries of dependence, or dreamed of encountering that of which I should be ashamed to speak.

I was kept busily employed all day, and when the company began to arrive I attended in an ante-room, furnished plentifully with looking-glasses, to assist. There might have been fifty

young people in all, and it was rather pleasant work to take off the outer garments of the little girls and boys, and touch up their shining hair, and watch the glee dancing in their bright eyes. I was lingering over one very pretty little girl, whose fair curls swept over her shoulders, when Miss Brown called out to me:

"Get rid of them little bothers as sharp as you can, I want you to help us."

There was a crowd of girls about my own age, and some older. When the "little bothers" were fairly turned out of the room, my services were more than ever in request, as the young ladies had brought their dresses in bandboxes. I had never before associated with young people —if it could be called associating, where none spoke to me except to ask my assistance—and all this flutter of preparation, and evident anxiety about effect, bewildered and surprised me more than anything that had come under my observation before. My previous sedentary life and inexperience must be taken into consideration when I say, that these young girls frequently made me blush, indeed, kept my face altogether in a glow, with what seemed to me very extraordinary boldness.

"I don't know whether to wear these white

roses in my hair, or have it plain," said the girl whose dress I was fastening. "Which would you do?"

"Oh, wear the roses; they're so nice in your dark hair," said the girl she addressed. "I've got a red geranium."

"Is there anybody worth dressing up for?" said my young lady. "Who's here?"

Miss Brown ran over a string of names, which I perceived were all masculine.

"Oh, I'm so glad Henry Smith's here!" said number one. "Isn't he a nice young man? always so spirity and full of fun. I mean Henry shall kiss me under the miseltoe. Here, can you arrange these in my hair?"

"For my part," said another girl, "I admire James Ridley: *so* gentlemanlike, isn't he?"

"Oh, I can't bear him," said a sprightly girl, who had been humming a tune, and seemed incapable of keeping her feet still. "He's so shy."

"Is he?" said another. "Do introduce me to him; I like to get hold of a shy young man. It's such fun. *I'll* brighten him up, see if I don't."

"Is your young man coming, Miss Jakes?"

"He may come or stop away," said Miss Jakes, tossing her head. "He's been in the sulks for a week. But if he does come, I'll pay

him off, for I intend to flirt desperately with Henry Smith," and in the lightness of her heart she commenced practising a few steps.

"There, go away, you're a bungler," said the young lady, whose roses came to nothing in my hands. "Do, dear, come and help me."

There were so many last touches before the young ladies could be satisfied with their appearances, that a full hour elapsed before I felt myself at liberty to seek Mrs. Brown, and learn what I was to do next. I had been standing all the day, and felt very weary, but I had been given to understand that I should be wanted all the evening.

All the company was assembled in the drawing-room, and I found Mrs. Brown in the usual sitting-room, where tables were spread for tea. I found with her a young man whom I had not seen before, and as I was retreating, she called me back.

"This is the governess as I told you about," she said. "My son, Miss Marples."

Mr. Brown, Junior, was taller than his father, which is not saying a great deal, as the latter gentleman was remarkably short; so that I inferred the "bigness" of which Miss Amelia spoke had reference solely to the young man's estimate of himself. He had his father's nose on

a larger scale; the same black hair and eyes; and whiskers of the same hue, and an incipient moustache, were just visible. He was dressed elaborately, I supposed for the occasion, and wore an eye-glass, which he elevated in order to take a better view of myself.

"Vewy pwapaw," he exclaimed, meaning my engagement, I suppose. "I hope you'll have the children in bettaw audwa. 'Pon my sawl she's pwetty."

"Hold your tongue, Francis James, do!" said his mother. "Miss Marples, do you attend to your own business; put them spoons in the sarcers, and fetch the sandwidges and all the things hoff the sideboard; there's room in the middle of the table."

Mrs. Brown spoke in a sharp, authoritative manner, as if she wished to counteract the possible effects of her son's admiration. The idea was monstrous enough, but I was obliged to entertain it.

The two went on talking, as the young ladies had done, reckoning me for nothing.

"I think you might have brought one on 'em just for to-night," said Mrs. Brown. "It's too bad."

"My dear madam, it's impossible," said the young man. "If these fellows once got a scent

of the shop it would be all up with me. I don't want to dispawage your company, but it wouldn't do, 'pon my soul."

"I don't see the use of your spending so much money over your fine folks, if you can't ask any on 'em home," said Mrs. Brown.

"The old boy," observed Mr. Brown, Junior, "talks of retiring into the country, in which case I may manage to intwoduce some of the fellows. At present it's out of the question. I intend to make myself vewy agweeable to-night, and I think that's as much as you can expect fwom me at pwesent."

"I'm sure your par 'll call out at them mustachers."

"He's a queaw old boy! pewhaps he will, but I cannot be a slave to pwejudices. I must positively join the ladies, or they'll think me wude."

I caught a glance of him as he walked out, holding his stiff collar with both hands and adjusting his head in it. I wondered if the ladies really missed him or wanted him.

"A fine young man, isn't he?" said Mrs. Brown.

I opened my mouth to say something, but remained silent. I bowed my head in assent.

"He's very clever, and every way above his station, though that's nothing to be sneezed at,

for his par's got money," continued Mrs. Brown. "But Francis James allays would keep the best company,—Lord Randy, and Sir John Boulder, and Colonel Spanks, and a whole lot of them sort of people. He'll be sadly out of his helement to-night."

The young man certainly gave me no high opinion of the company he kept. His cool, easy impudence was at once so offensive and so ridiculous that one did not know whether to laugh or get angry. I had a pretty clear perception of his being altogether beneath contempt.

Mrs. Brown gave me directions about superintending the tea-table provided for the younger visitors, and then departed in order to collect them. Simultaneously with the young people appeared all the servants with all sorts of viands. Nothing I had as yet seen astonished me more than the gormandizing qualities of the atoms of humanity over whom I presided. Piles of plum-cake, plain cake, muffins, tea-cakes, tarts, biscuits, toast, bread and butter, shrimps, ham sandwiches, potted meats, and oceans of tea, disappeared with a rapidity that to me became quite alarming. One little boy, with his mouthful, declared that he always drank seven cups when he went to a party, and I believe he took even more. When all were satisfied and dismissed (the elder visitors

took tea in the drawing-room), I and Mary sat down, and afterwards helped to clear the things away.

I was very busy when one of the young ladies entered from the drawing-room, dragging after her a little boy, who, with his hand before his face, appeared to me to be crying, but I soon found that he was half choking himself with a fit of suppressed laughter.

"You wicked little wretch," said his sister, shaking him violently, "see if I don't tell of you when we get home. I've a good mind to send you home now. You," she said, addressing me, "keep him here; I want to punish him."

The boy did not seem to care much; he went into a corner, and had a good laugh by himself. I asked him what had amused him so much.

"It's her," he said, pointing towards the drawing-room; "she's so funny."

"He's very naughty," said Mary; "he's been making game of Miss Melia."

"She's like 'Humpty dumpty sat on a wall,'" said the boy. "I shall laugh at her;—what's she so ugly for then?"

I tried to reason with him, to make him understand that she could not help it; that God might punish him by making him also deformed; but he kept on tittering, and I could make

nothing of him. And little can be made of children whose character, early perverted at home, becomes fixed before they are turned over to those expected to educate them. They are educated already, for the first lessons of life determine the bent of all after-teaching.

Presently Mrs. Brown came in to ask if the boy would go back and be good, and he made a half-promise.

"You'd better come in now," she said to me, "and you can look after the children. Meely's put me out with coming down; I didn't want her to, it's all her par's fault. Now mind, when they begin to dance you play the pianer."

I followed her into the room. The glaring light, and the crowd, and the noise, confused me. Then the heat was stifling. There were several new arrivals, men and women, young and elderly; there was a deal of shouting, and loud laughter, and clapping of hands, and sprightly conversation, and running to and fro of children; and in the midst of the general hubbub some one was producing a crashing noise out of the piano. There was a twelfth-cake, and a drawing of characters was going on, that every now and then produced frantic exclamations and much mirth. I was looking out for Amelia, who was seated on a high chair at the extremity of the

room, with a table before her, when I was requested to take out two children who were sick. No wonder, eating rich cake, and sucking oranges, and drinking wine, after such a meal as they had lately made!

I was kept employed until at length the folding doors that connected the two rooms were thrown open, and a clear space was made for dancing. The children's dancing-master was present with his violin, and I was to accompany him on the piano. Meanwhile I had had time enough to look around me and receive certain impressions. It struck me that the elder girls, with their giddiness, and affectation, and readiness to make advances, were unlike anything I had ever heard or read of; that the young men, shallow, and conceited (as they well might be), and evidently great in frivolities, were but indifferent samples of the species to which they belonged; that the elder men were coarser than seemed quite proper; the women strongly given to slander (I overheard some of them who were gathered into little confidential groups); and that altogether there was an absence of refinement and real good feeling, that, united with the noise and heat, and my own weariness, inspired me with sensations bordering upon disgust. If all this time I was unconsciously exalting myself

above those around me, I was sufficiently despised in turn; for, except that Mr. Brown, Junior, had once approached to ask if I did not find it "vewy wawm," no one had spoken to me since I entered the room.

I played until a late hour when all the children were sent home; and then I played on, as the elder visitors had only just commenced in earnest. During a pause, Mr. Brown (who did not make his appearance till the shop was closed) brought me a glass of wine and a biscuit.

"Ain't you tired?" he said; "let somebody else play a bit, and you have a hop."

This was an odd remedy for being tired, but I told him I had not learned to dance.

"Not larned to dance! Oh, never mind; you can jump about to the tune, and that's as much as most on 'em does. I've got a pardner for you, —come, now, get up a bit."

Mr. Brown meant to be kind, and I rose up, though without any intention of dancing. To my horror, I beheld the two apprentices, headed by the shopman, Tony, looking more hideous and diabolical than ever in his holiday dress.

"This young man," said Mr. Brown, bringing the monster forward, "wants you for a pardner. Tony, talk to the young woman a bit; I want all on you to be jolly to-night."

Thinking, I dare say, that he had done a good deal for me, Mr. Brown walked away.

I turned to the piano and sat down again.

"What a gal you are!" said Tony, leaning his arms on the instrument, and approaching me so closely that I was compelled to rise again. "Come, now, if you'll be my pardner I won't say nothing about you knows what."

I could not speak to the man, even to repulse him: there were no words expressive of the deep disgust I felt, and I walked hastily across the room and seated myself beside the deformed girl.

"Are you tired?" I asked.

"No; I like to see 'em. I wish they knew how I hated 'em all, fine and handsome as they think theirselves. They've been laughing at me, and I can laugh at them."

"You should not notice children," I said; "they don't know what they do."

"Oh, it's not the children, it's every one of 'em. *I* see it, though they think me a fool as well as humpbacked and ugly. Never you mind."

"But you are not ugly," I said, "and if you liked you might look handsomer than any one in this room."

"What a one you are for gammon!"

"Nay, I am quite serious. You might, by thinking kindly of every one, and wearing a

bright, pleasant look. You would be so much happier, too."

"You've got that out of them tracts, and they're all lies. You should see how Mar flies out if anybody offends her a bit; and Matilda Jane,—Lord she'd make you stare! Let me alone about looking pleasantly when I hate everybody. I could scratch their eyes out!"

I had been preaching, as many do, what I could not myself practise. The odious Tony came up and I shrank from him as if he had been something venomous.

"I wants Miss Marples to be my pardner, and she won't," he said. "Try and persuade her, Miss Meliar."

"Try yourself," said Amelia. "What do I care about your pardners and your jigging about like fools? Now they're a beginning it. Law how I do hate 'em!"

There was a sudden tumult in the room, which resounded with shrill screams. The gentlemen had got the ladies under the mistletoe, and if the latter liked it rather than otherwise, they made an odd sort of demonstration. I remembered the threat of the odious man, Tony, and I shrank further into the corner with a shiver of horror. How this availed me nothing,—how I was forcibly dragged forward and kissed by every man in the room,

Tony amongst the rest, I will pass slightly over. When I was at length released I burst into tears.

"Law, if she ain't a crying!" exclaimed one of the girls.

"What nonsense!" said several.

"She wants kissing again," said Mr. Henry Smith, the greatest puppy where all were great that way, "and pon my honour if I wasn't out of breath—"

"Come, come, let's have done with it," said Mrs. Brown. "And deary me, Miss Marples, I'm surprised at your making a piece of work in my house, as if we didn't know what's proper. Bless us! if these young ladies isn't too fine to be kissed, *you* don't need to cry out."

"What disgusting affectation!" said Miss Brown as she flounced past me.

I had, indeed, only made myself ridiculous; and my tears dried up as if my eyes had been balls of fire. I was allowed to sit at the piano again, and the party broke up at four o'clock in the morning.

During another week the children had a holiday, and I was plentifully supplied with needlework. I had, besides, general instructions to improve Miss Brown in music and French; but that young lady had a profound contempt for my

capacity, and the plan proved a failure. When I at length commenced with the younger children I found them so deficient in the commonest kinds of knowledge that I set about giving them some instruction in English before I attempted French, and asked for such books as I required, and which I did not find in the house. There was some demur about supplying me. Mrs. Brown did not see the use of wasting so much time about "grammar and such like." Arithmetic was very well, but geography might be learned from the newspapers, and she thought history all stuff. She reminded me over and over again that she wanted the children to learn music and French. However, I had a little of my own way, and I set to in earnest; and a more refractory or unpromising set of pupils never fell into mortal hands. Accustomed to have their own way, and seeing me treated as a menial, it was impossible to obtain any authority over them. Wanting capacity one way, they made up in another. They were very ingenious at turning everything into ridicule, so that it was impossible to fix their attention seriously for five minutes together. After doing my best, I was compelled to ask Mrs. Brown to interpose with her authority, and then she thought my system must be wrong, as the children had done very well at school. I

soon found that I must not entertain any hope of giving satisfaction.

It was trying enough to live entirely upstairs with these children and Miss Amelia, who had conceived a positive dislike to me for having been such a hypocrite as to pretend not liking to be kissed. Amelia hated hypocrites above everything; she hated those who submitted to be kissed and liked it, but my affectation had disgusted her as it did Miss Brown.

I had been in the house about three months when, one evening, I was sent for down stairs. I found Mr., Mrs., and Miss Brown, and an elderly man in the sitting-room. I was desired to sit down, and Mrs. Brown asked me if I had heard anything about Mr. Chaundy.

I had not, and said so.

"He's took to prison for debt, howsomever," said Mrs. Brown. "I'm sure we thought he was quite a gentleman when we let him come here. Do you know anything of his family?"

I did not.

"How long did you know him afore you come here?"

"About three weeks."

"Queer, ain't it?" said Mr. Brown.

"*I* thinks it very queer," said Mrs. Brown, "and he knowed nothing of you afore?"

"No."

"It's a good job as he didn't borrow money from us," said Mr. Brown.

"I hated the sight of him," said Miss Brown; "he wasn't like a respectable clergyman."

"No more he was," said Mrs. Brown. "He was a odd man, allays joking with the servants and lowering hisself. I wonder if he was a clergyman after all, or a impostor?"

"Oh! he was a clergyman," said the visitor; "I had that from Mr. Fulton."

"You can go upstairs, Miss Marples," said Mrs. Brown.

I augured no good from this conversation and Mrs. Brown's manner. On three or four occasions I had been tortured by Tony's threats to tell all he knew, and I was not sure that he had not told. I abhorred the state of dependence that subjected me to this low malice, and that made it a terror to me. What had I to fear or to be ashamed of after all; why could I not speak to Mrs. Brown as a Christian woman, and tell all the truth? How I warred with myself; how I scorned her, feeling that this was impossible!

The news of our friend's misfortune grieved me deeply. Comparing him with others, I knew that he was a noble, warm-hearted man, and I was just beginning to feel how really friendless we

were in the world. I expected Jem on the following day, and I determined to ask leave to visit my grandfather so that I might learn all the particulars.

I wanted to see my grandfather for many reasons. It was a satisfaction to me, even while I wished to remain where I was, if possible, to believe that matters were coming to a crisis. My borrowed dignity, of *not* being the niece of a charwoman, sat too heavily upon me, because it was enforced. What, after all, did Mrs. Brown suppose me to be? Poor—or I should not have sought the shelter of her roof. I had not deceived her, for I had been asked no questions: yet I felt as if I had made myself liable to a charge of imposition. I was beginning to despise myself as well as others; and I thought that my grandfather would agree with me that this was an unwholesome state of feeling, that should be remedied at any price.

Letters had passed between us, and I knew that they were in other lodgings, and that my grandfather continued to obtain work. I knew, too, that Mr. Chaundy frequently visited them, and felt how much they would miss him. The Browns, with their many friends, most probably did not possess an individual one whose misfortunes or absence would have caused them regret.

And from what I had already observed, I could not help feeling that deep and strong affections were not common in the world. A great deal of sentiment that sounds very well, and that is very well in itself, has been written on the love of mothers; but ten to one that the reading of it brings before any experienced person such a host of unmistakeably real mothers of the Mrs. Brown class, intriguing heartlessly for sons or daughters, and by the example and constant ingrafting of selfishness desecrating all that might have been sacred between them, and hardening all that ought to have been malleable for good, that the attractive ideal glimmers in the distance like a lone star. And if the love, even of mothers, so far from being always a beautiful and a holy thing, is frequently made to look ugly and revolting, it is not wonderful that amongst brothers and sisters indifference should grow up into hatred, where unruly passions and self-interest divide them from the beginning. What most of the friendships and more serious after-connections of life come to under such circumstances, is best known to the millions who make up the population of this Christian land. I asked leave of a few hours' absence with some fear of a refusal, because there was not a minute in the day during which I had not

plenty to do. Mrs. Brown, however, gave her consent very readily.

"O yes, you may go, certingly, Miss Marples. I was just going to tell you—leastways, I was to-morrow, when your month's up—that I must give you notice, as you don't quite suit as I expected. You can let your grandfather know, as I intend to behave handsome and allow you a month's notice."

This was saving me much trouble, though it was not exactly what I wanted. When I considered, however, that what with their rebellious habits, and want of capacity, and almost entire ignorance of everything else, it would be a long time before I could bring the young Browns forward in music and French, I could only feel that it was for the best. I was beginning, too, to have more confidence in myself; and I had a month before me to look out for another situation.

On the whole, I felt lighter in heart than I had done for a long time. On the following morning, when I was told that some one wanted me, I hurried down stairs, expecting to see Jem; but instead of him, I found a little girl of about ten years old. I asked her what had become of him.

"He's gone with the mister," she replied.

I asked her to wait till I was ready, and then to show me where my grandfather lived. She said she lived in the same house in Brook's Court, and I found it a close, unwholesome place, with tall, dingy houses, filled from basement to roof with lodgers.

I found my grandfather and Aunt Betsy in a back room on the second floor, to which was added a large closet that held a bed. It was altogether a falling off from Mrs. Dent's rooms; and not having seen either of my relations for so long a time, I was struck by a painful alteration in their appearance. My aunt's complexion had become sallow, and she was much thinner; and there was a wan, shadowy look about my grandfather that wrung my heart. I found him busily writing, and one of his favourite books lay on the table beside him: it was open; and when I glanced at the page, my eye fell on these lines of Cotton's "Retirement:"—

"Good God! how sweet are all things here!
How beautiful the fields appear!
How cleanly do we feed and lie!
Lord! what good hours do we keep!
How quietly we sleep!
What peace, what unanimity!
How innocent from the lewd fashion
Is all our business, all our recreation!"

The dear, good old man! had he been trying

to realise a dream of his old home, with its quietness, its cleanliness, its pure air and rural sights,—things he had loved so well? I spoke calmly, in spite of the swelling of my heart, when we sat down together. Jem had brought the news of Mr. Chaundy's misfortune only a few days previously, and had been with him ever since. For perhaps the first time in his life, my grandfather regretted that he had not money.

"It would have been a pleasure to have helped so kind a friend," he said; "we must pray for him."

I told my own story, giving only the principal cause of my dismissal,—my not being able to impart French and music to the young people as if by magic.

"Well, well, you cannot do impossibilities," said my grandfather. "We must go to the register-office again."

I asked if we could not go that day, as I did not know when I could get out again, and my grandfather consented. Then we had a long talk about a hundred different matters; and he showed me the money—three pounds—which I had sent by Jem, and which he said he was saving for me. It was a satisfaction to know that he had not yet been compelled to make use of it, and I hoped to add to, instead of taking it away.

After dinner, we proceeded to the register-office, situated somewhere in the city. In a very crowded thoroughfare we wanted to cross the street, and were compelled to wait until several vehicles, apparently jammed together, went past. There was some quarrelling amongst the drivers.

"Take that fellow's number, will you?" called out an imperious voice. "He blocks up the way on purpose."

I looked in the direction of the speaker. He was seated in a handsome cab, with a servant in livery at his side. There was no mistaking the martial figure; the clear, bronze, complexion; the eagle eyes; the black hair, and moustache curling over the upper lip; the proud disdainful look that I had encountered only once before:—it was Colonel Leigh.

I gazed at him steadily and determinedly. *My* eyes, too, could flash back disdain and defiance, though they could not express the intense loathing with which, in my inmost soul, I regarded that man.

"Now, then! out of the way there!" he exclaimed.

Just before the whip fell, he looked full in my upturned face. It was evident that he recognised me, for he made an indecisive movement, pausing for a second; and then the heavy frown

gathered upon his face:—he lashed the horse savagely, and passed from my sight.

For this my aunt had brought us together that day—that we might know one another if we met in the world. To what purpose? If my grandfather saw him, he did not mention the subject, nor did I. We arrived at the register-office, and stated our business.

"Are you the young lady that called on Mrs. Wilton in Wimpole Street?" asked the man.

I told him I was.

"Then," he said, "she wants to see you again; you may call any morning at the same time."

We considered this an extraordinary piece of good fortune, and walked home rather gaily. I was particularly gratified, because Mrs. Wilton understood I had a difficulty about obtaining a character, and seemed inclined to pass it over; but when we arrived at home, my grandfather observed that I could at least obtain a character for good conduct from Mrs. Brown,—she had nothing to say against me that way.

I, however, had a fixed notion that Mrs. Brown's testimony any way was not desirable. I felt sure that she was dismissing me as a disreputable person, and one who had been palmed upon her

under false pretences. It seemed clear to me that she had come to a knowledge of my "low connexions and bringings up," as Tony had it; and if this was sufficient to drive me out of her house, I could scarcely be considered respectable enough to enter Mrs. Wilton's.

In the course of the afternoon, Jem came in. I was surprised and pleased, too, to see him wear so bright a look. My grandfather asked him how Mr. Chaundy was.

"Oh, he's quite right," said Jem. "He told me to come down an' see if I could help you; an' if you'd come an' see him he'd be glad."

"That I will, certainly," said my grandfather.

"It must have grieved you to see Mr. Chaundy in such trouble," said Aunt Betsy.

"Lor' bless you, no," said Jem. "If they'd made a bishop on him I might a broken my heart, an' nobody to care. It's all for his good; that's where I take it. Trouble keeps his heart in the right place, an' mine too. When I go into that blessed Queen's Bench, you should see how he brightens up. 'Jem,' says he, 'I don't know what I should do without you, Jem.' That's what I call being *alive*. Do you think he'd say that to me if they'd a put him in a palace? By jingo!'"

"A little selfishness about that, though, eh, Jem?" said my grandfather, smiling. "Well, we get on in this world some way."

He asked Jem if he knew whether Mr. Chaundy was likely to obtain his freedom soon; and Jem, apparently scouting the idea, said he thought not. What should he for? There was good living at the Bench altogether: he didn't see, for his part, how anybody could die there.

And then Jem looked in the place where the coals and wood were kept, and finding the stock low, rose up for the purpose of replenishing it.

"Any more orders?" he asked.

"You are a handy fellow, and a willing one, Jem," said my grandfather; "but we must not impose upon your good nature all along in this way. How are you to live if you work gratis, as you do for us? You must allow us to pay you something—it is only right."

"Don't you say nothin' about that 'ere," said Jem. "How am I to live? Lor' bless you, I fatten amazin' among kind-spoken people. I live up here, an' I live down yonder at the Bench. It's jolly living at the Bench. I've got flesh since Mr. Chaundy was took."

Poor Jem seemed to live on his philosophy, which is more than wiser men have been able to

do. His constant good will and eagerness to oblige certainly had the desired effect of drawing us towards him.

During his absence my grandfather wrote a letter to Mr. Chaundy, which he afterwards gave him to deliver; and then, in order to save my grandfather's time, Jem insisted upon seeing me back to Mrs. Brown's.

Jem's simplicity and singleness of heart, and perfect reliance on the good faith established between us, were conspicuous in this offer. It happily never occurred to his honest head that I might object to such a chaperon in broad daylight, respectful though he was, and evidently proud of his charge, and entertaining beyond all this, as he walked at my side, an idea that something precious to himself, and nothing to that dense, driving crowd, linked us two together. This was the impression upon me of his manner altogether, and I was right. Yet what a forlorn object he was to be looked upon by those who did not look close enough; and who would think of doing that? Dressed in ragged clothes that had never fitted him, in patched, dirty boots, twisted into odd shapes; without a hat, for he never wore one, and with his grizzled hair floating about his singularly weatherbeaten face. I thought of that other man, from whom I had a passing glance of

repulse earlier in the day, and of the difference betwixt the two to me and to the world. If there was a God who noted these things, how stood each of them with Him? Perhaps, even whilst I felt my faith shaken, this was His way of teaching me to look forward to that "great day of the Lord." Well, I should see.

"There's not a many," said Jem, in allusion to my dismissal from Mrs. Brown's, "there's not a many as lights on the right sort at first. Lor' bless you! look at me—never met with a kind-spoken individual till I see Mr. Chaundy. I knowed them folks wouldn't do; but you'll meet the right sort at last, not a doubt on it."

"After waiting as long as you did, I suppose, Jem," I said, bitterly.

"It don't seem so long when its over," said Jem. "Nothin' of the sort; an' then, when you meets with this here kind, you seem to have known 'em all your life. That makes up, you see."

This was an odd kind of encouragement, and I managed differently, if not better, for myself. I did not care about meeting with kind people; I only craved the power of defending myself against the world *en masse*. There was a stern determination in my spirit when I contemplated this possible long life of cheerless and abject slavery.

It was not my fault if I was not constituted to bear it, and at the worst I possessed the power of releasing myself.

Brought up as I had been, it was odd that with all my restless energy, and pride, and impatience of control, I could set myself up in judgment, and reason and decide so coolly as I did. Odd that the long teachings of my grandfather should be so suddenly neutralized by the opinions of Uncle Stephen, and the first lesson taught me by the injustice of the world. I felt all this at the time. I cannot help it, I said in self-defence; I can battle rather than endure; and who shall teach me that it is wrong to war with evil?

I had a new favour to ask of Mrs. Brown,—leave to call on Mrs. Wilton. I made the request that night, and she seemed at once to be incredulous, and to be annoyed at the idea of my so readily obtaining another place.

"Why you don't mean to say as you've had time to look for another sitiwation?"

I explained that I had seen Mrs. Wilton some months ago, and that she wished me to call upon her again.

"Oh! you're very fortunate, I think," said Mrs. Brown. "As to giving you a chariter, I don't know what to say, I'm sure; such things as has come to my knowledge."

"I believe I shall not require you to give me a character," I replied.

"Good gracious, Miss Marples! don't shout like that in my house! You fairly made me start. There's no call for you to be imperent."

I said I had no wish to be impertinent, and did not know that I had been.

"You must understand," said Mrs. Brown, "that if I'm to pay you for the next month, I can't do with you going out every day to look after places."

I assured her that I should not trouble her about going out again; and giving a reluctant consent, she dismissed me.

On the following morning my grandfather again accompanied me to Wimpole Street. All night I had been thinking that Mrs. Wilton must be possessed of some liberality of feeling, or she would not have sent for me again. Upon this presumed liberality I determined to throw myself, by telling her exactly how we were situated in London, and what reason I had for believing that Mrs. Brown would not recommend me. I had some reliance on the French lady, too, if she chanced to be there. I knew that in France governesses were trained from the humblest classes, and that their origin was no detriment to their advancement. I told my grandfather all

this, and he approved of what I was about to do. I found Mrs. Wilton alone.

"O, you have been informed, I suppose, that I wished to see you again," she said. "The fact is, I have met with so much selfishness amongst those from whom I had a right to expect something better, that in very despair I am compelled to turn to less promising subjects. I think I understood, from our last conversation, that you were illegitimate?"

The blood rushed to my face as I inclined my head in assent.

"Is your father a gentleman?"

"By birth and education he should have been one," I replied.

"And he takes no notice of you?"

"My grandfather has never troubled him, and I am sure I never shall," I replied. "I was educated in the hope that I should be able to earn my own living."

"That's quite proper," she said. "Now, I don't wish to hurt your feelings, but it is necessary I should understand a little about you. What have you been doing since I saw you last?"

I gave her a full account of my engagement with Mrs. Brown: I told her what my grandfather was doing, what Aunt Betsy had been

reduced to do, and my bad odour with Mrs. Brown in consequence. Beyond this objection to my low connections and to my method of teaching the children I believed Mrs. Brown could say nothing against me.

"If I conclude to engage you," said Mrs. Wilton, when she had heard me to the end, "you will perceive that I waive some disadvantages. As you are situated a permanent home will be a good thing for you. And as you seem well-behaved and competent to teach, I am willing to try if we can get on together. As to the huckster's wife, I shall not think of asking a recommendation from her. When do you leave her?"

"A month to-day."

"Then, in the meantime I should like to see your grandfather. It will be proper to let him know the terms upon which I receive you."

I told her that my grandfather had accompanied me and was then waiting for me below.

"O, very well," she said, and ringing the bell desired that he might be shown up.

My grandfather was quite a gentlemanly as well as a venerable looking old man. I felt proud of him as he advanced and saluted Mrs. Wilton with the natural courtesy that implied respect without servility. I felt sure that Mrs. Wilton was favourably impressed by his appearance.

"Sit down, sir," she said, pointing to a chair. "I have been talking to your granddaughter, and I have some hopes that she will suit me. With your permission, I presume, she has told me how she is situated; and I have no doubt you will see the advantage of her obtaining a comfortable and permanent home. This I can offer, and will continue to her if she gives satisfaction, as I trust she will."

"She has always been a dear, good child," said my grandfather, surveying me with tears in his eyes. "I can answer for her doing her best; and for her remembering with gratitude that you have overlooked some unfavourable circumstances that might have weighed against her with others. She is friendless in the world, and quite aware that her future welfare depends upon her own good conduct. I can trust her without fear."

"Well! upon my word, I'm quite inclined to trust her," said Mrs. Wilton. "Then we seem to understand each other. I overlook some things, as you say, in the hope that your granddaughter will be satisfied with my offer of a comfortable home. Then this is settled. At the end of the month I shall expect you, Miss Marples."

We rose and took leave. I don't know how it happened that it never occurred to either of us

that nothing had been said about any salary. Such was the fact, however. My grandfather especially was much elated; he considered my present engagement as a great step forward, and eulogised Mrs. Wilton's liberality in dispensing with a recommendation from others. For my part, too, I felt grateful to her; and the prospect of being amongst refined people gratified me more than anything else.

During the remainder of my time at Mrs. Brown's, I found cause to rejoice still more in the prospect of getting away. Frequent quarrels with Mr. Brown on their son's account soured her temper so that she quarrelled with everything and everybody; and these family disagreements brought more prominently forward the unamiable traits in the characters of Miss Brown and Amelia. As to Tony, having fulfilled his mission with regard to me, he seemed inclined to leave me to myself.

I managed to part from this family quietly, though every member of it (I do not include the aristocratic Francis James), took some pains to let me see they were glad to be rid of me. I remained a few days with my grandfather and Aunt Betsy, mending and replenishing my clothes; and in this way two out of my four pounds disappeared. Jem came whilst I was

there, and he still continued to speak of Mr. Chaundy with great glee. My grandfather, however, gave a different account of him.

"He bears his troubles like a man," he said, "but he is evidently fretting himself to death. It is quite painful to hear him speak of relations who could help him and won't. Then he is becoming very stout without having any wholesome flesh upon him: he smokes all day long and eats nothing, and if he remains in yonder confined place, I am sure he will die."

I had the same thought about my grandfather and the close unwholesome atmosphere in which he lived. Every time I saw him he seemed to be more wan and shadowy, his gait more feeble, so that I gave up all hope of realising the first wish of my heart, which had been to make his last days happy. If I resigned this cherished expectation with a pang, it is no wonder that I dwelt with added bitterness upon the conduct of those who had laboured to crush him down for well-doing, and who had succeeded but too well. The God in whom he trusted for help stood afar off; no one sorrow or indignity was to be spared him, and I, how could I hope a better fate for myself, deserving far less as I did? The ice about my heart would not thaw, but I possessed even more of indomitable resolution. I do not know

what it was that made me long for the quicker passing of time, seeing that I only expected from time that it would bring forth more evil. The slow progress of days and months was, however, a great weariness to me; I was impatient without expectation, because the aspirations within me had as yet taken no shape.

CHAPTER VII.

I ENTERED upon my duties at Mrs. Wilton's, and found some reason to be satisfied. She treated me with consideration, and the children, who were almost too well behaved, rendered me ready obedience. When I say that Mrs. Wilton treated me considerately, I mean that she always addressed me politely, if not kindly, and that went a great way with me. In other respects I dare say there was much that a more fastidious or less dependent person than myself would have objected to. The Wiltons had altogether the appearance of people living beyond their means, by striving to make a great show with little. The servants considered them mean and never stopped long, and little comfort was provided for any one. There were seven children and one nurse-maid, so that I had to take part of her duties, and one that fell en-

tirely upon me was to fashion the children's clothes out of Mrs. Wilton's old ones. Then we were badly lodged, crowding together with the children, and fed only meagrely. As I had never lived luxuriously, nor seen much of what is called pleasure, as, too, I had no objection to hard work, I did not feel inclined to murmur, except generally at fate, for allotting to me a life uncongenial from its monotony, and dependence, and obscurity. Mrs. Wilton was a gay woman, with a crowd of fine acquaintances who seemed to take her a good deal from home. Her husband, I learned, was a city merchant. I sometimes caught a glimpse of him, and thought he had a very careworn, downcast look. I often fancied that he could not feel very happy in the home from which his wife was so frequently absent, leaving him to dine alone, and go out or pass the evening by himself. I began, too, after a lapse of some months, to consider my own affairs; to wonder whether Mrs. Wilton really meant to give me any salary, and what I should do if she did not. I had poor accounts from Aunt Betsy of my grandfather, whose eyes began to fail him so that he could no longer write quickly, or well enough to give satisfaction. This was a terrible blow to all of us, as we could only anticipate that he would become still more disabled. I had not the confidence in

Mrs. Wilton that would have led me to speak to her of this calamity with the hope that she would pay me something in consequence. I dreaded offending her and being sent back, a burden upon those who were already poor enough; and yet it was almost as bad to remain where I was with the consciousness of being unable to help them. I determined at all events to ask leave to visit them, and then I could ask my grandfather what he thought it proper for me to do.

I had been with Mrs. Wilton nearly five months, and as she allowed her children no summer holiday, I had had none. I thought she would not consider it unreasonable that I wished to go home for a day.

"It is quite impossible to spare you to-morrow, Miss Marples," she said in reply to my request; "or indeed any day this week. We will see about it next week. But I mean to give you a treat, and Mary Jane and Raymond too. To-morrow I shall take you to a meeting of the Anti-Slavery Association. It will do you all good to understand what privileges you enjoy in this free and happy country; how favoured you are above thousands of your fellow creatures who are frightfully oppressed in other lands, because they have a dark skin. O, I think it quite shocking, and that it is especially the duty of people with

families to set their faces against such a system. There will be very distinguished people there, too, and it will be quite a grand sight."

"Will papa go?" asked Raymond, a boy eleven years old.

"O no! papa has his business to attend to and must not be disturbed."

And, indeed, Mr. Wilton, who had the dull look that "all work and no play" gives to a man, never seemed to be considered in his wife's schemes for recreation. It was very rarely that she thought of the children in that way; and never having been spoilt, but rather severely kept down, all of them had something of the quiet manner and general listlessness of their father. This was particularly the case with the two eldest. All were obedient without displaying any alacrity, and all were deficient in the buoyant spirit of childhood and youth, down to the baby, who tumbled about amongst us and got on as well as it could.

Neither Mary Jane, the eldest, nor Raymond, seemed to think more of this treat than I did; however, we all prepared to go on the following day. Mrs. Wilton, who had no carriage of her own, manœuvred pretty successfully to get the use of those of her acquaintances, and on this occasion she contrived to distribute us amongst

three parties, so that we set off in grand style. I forget the name of the building at which we alighted. We walked up a broad staircase and entered an immense hall, in which was a gallery. The place was crowded to excess, even when we entered, and many had not yet arrived. Many distinguished people, as Mrs. Wilton had said, seemed to be there. I had never before seen such a waving of feathers, and glistening of silks, and fluttering of gauzes. These seemed to me the right sort of people to understand and appreciate the privileges they enjoyed in this free and happy country. As for me, my refractory spirit was at work to consider what was the particular privilege for which I was individually required to be thankful. The universal privilege, to labour, had hitherto proved very unproductive to myself, and I was lamentably ignorant of any other for which I stood indebted to the land of my birth. Perhaps it was a great matter for such as I was to be allowed to bask in the light of those distinguished countenances, whose excess of radiance only served to show more distinctly the realities about myself; to gaze upon that splendour, one of the glories of the land, called forth purposely to blazon the Christian meekness, the benevolent zeal, that gave to the poor negro so august a band of sisters and brothers.

But outward show made little impression upon me. In thought, I tore down the gay trappings and stripped that gorgeously attired assembly to the heart's core, and wondered how much would be left to get up another exhibition if a swift and sudden desolation were to come and annihilate all that was not genuine around me. That much was spurious was evident enough in the manner of all. Taking my ideas of Christian courtesy from books rather than men, the excessive politeness of polite people amongst themselves struck me as being at once vulgar and hollow. I thought so on that day, when I witnessed so much cringing and bowing, accompanied by an idiotic sort of smirk on the countenances of the men: so much affectation, and fluttering about, and ready smiling, and majestic sweeping of plumed heads amongst the women. A very important-looking, middle-aged gentleman, hurrying past me before I had yet found a seat, gave me a sudden push that sent me two or three paces forward, and a card which I had in my hand fell to the floor. He turned round with an impatient glance that lighted upon me and the card too, and then hurried on. He had evidently comprehended in an instant of time that I did not belong to that grade of society to which his attentions were exclusively due, therefore he offered no apology,

and left me to pick up the card. I set my foot upon it; and from that pedestal, with the thoughts that were then upon me, I could have uttered more startling truths than met my ear through the day; for there was nothing so monstrous in the fact of bad men boldly persevering in an evil course, as appeared in the hourly contradictions practised by those pretending to abound in Christian love, and humility, and charity; practised, too, in broad daylight, as a matter of course, and commented upon by none, unless by some such insignificant observer as myself, whose private opinion went for nothing, and whose aggrieved feeling stood no chance of notice from the world.

After placing myself and the children in our seats, Mrs. Wilton bent down and whispered:—

"You will remain where you are until I come to you; I shall sit at some distance. There will be a collection, Miss Marples; you will give your mite, and the children will give their mites. It is really a blessed privilege to be allowed to do something in such a cause."

This privilege, which took the shape of an obligation, filled me with dismay. I had a small purse in my pocket containing four shillings out of the five given me by my grandfather for pocket-money. I had dreaded spending a penny

more than was necessary, and now, how much was I to part with in this grand place, and for so stupendous an object as the emancipation of a whole race of people?

If those who are personally free from real wants and cares, are incapable of feeling otherwise than superficially for actual distress and oppression, others may make light of it by comparison with their own need and sorrow. I was, perhaps, as capable of sympathizing with the down-trodden negroes as any there, yet I could not avoid feeling that I rather stood in need of help for myself, than of being called upon to help any. Mine seemed the worse case, too, because as an inhabitant of this free and happy country, I stood no chance of having my wants recognized or cared for.

A tall, thin man, dressed in black, ascended a platform and commenced an address. He held a white pocket handkerchief in his right hand, which he flourished and occasionally applied to his eyes, and I saw that others followed his example. He had himself seen much of the negro race in different parts of the world, and he certainly entered into a long detail of horrors. His discourse created a great sensation, accompanied by a variety of exclamations; and his appeals to the people of England were greeted

with bursts of applause. I was not so readily moved to enthusiasm. I could not help thinking that, except in the sale and separation of bodies, there was not much difference in the kind of oppression that may be and is exercised everywhere. Even here affections may be crushed out and down; souls bartered, outraged, maddened—or pushed aside as the most worthless of all commodities, and here, too, effort may be rendered availless. I thought no more than this, as speaker after speaker rose up, and the sensation around me deepened. One gentleman, of whom a lady near me said, "That's Lord Colvin," called especially upon the higher classes, whose sensibilities were refined by education and habit, to set a noble example to the country at large by a unanimous expression of their abhorrence of the system of slavery, and of their sympathy with the oppressed. "And as this appeal of ours is intimately connected with the labours of our missionaries," he continued, "I shall now resign the subject to abler hands; to one whose whole life has been a labour of love, devoted to this cause above all others. And what friend of the negro has not heard his name? What enemy of slavery has not had his voice borne to him by many winds, thundering forth the anathemas of the Gospel against the oppressions of earth? Who amongst

you does not know him, personally or by report, for his good works go before him, and his flock call him 'blessed?' I need scarcely add that I allude to the good, the pious, the venerable Thomas Selby, dean of ———."

A loud burst of applause greeted the name, and it rose to an uproar when the dean himself appeared upon the platform. And a very venerable and good old man he did look, with his pale, thin face, and white hair, and half-closed eyes; and very meekly he seemed to bear his honours as he stood slightly inclining his head, and with his hands crossed upon his bosom. To what purpose did the quickened blood in my heart rise up against this man, whom thousands were eager to honour? Who in that vast assembly would have cared for me, or what I considered my wrongs? Was there one that would not have defended him, and said that he had done right? No, I believe not. For it is true that in England there is that worst species of slavery which originates in a belief that from poverty can proceed no good thing, and that wealth and rank can commit no evil. This is the universal creed, whatever else is preached, and in spite of noisy declamation to the contrary,—in spite, too, of the free and honest efforts of independent and liberal-minded men to introduce something better. It is that

which a nation practises in its daily life, not that which it declaims about, that influences the heart and mind of a people.

I, who knew how proudly the dean could bear himself; I, who had never obtained a passing glance from him, though he had often swept close past me in his priestly garments; how could I help marvelling at the deep humility with which he confessed his unworthiness before that brilliant company; at the benignant sweetness of his countenance as he turned from side to side, as if bestowing a mental benediction upon the whole human race? How could even I suspect him of harbouring pride in his heart? How resolutely he disclaimed all praise for what he had done! How his own short-comings stared him in the face when he suddenly found himself famous through having performed a very small part of a large duty! He was altogether weak, he said; only strong in this—having a good cause and determination to do his best for the future. Then he spoke of the missions, and, notwithstanding his previous disclaimer, alluded to the part he had taken throughout a long life in promoting them. When he finally called upon those assembled to contribute largely for the purposes that had been specified, there was another thunder of applause that stunned me, and then there was

a jingling of money upon plates, and I thought of my four shillings and wondered what I should do.

I did not wonder long. A gentleman collector approached where I was sitting. His erect figure, and handsome face, with its proud eyes and haughty lip, were always present with me. And now we had met again, and Colonel Leigh handed the plate, nearly filled with gold, to the young Wiltons, who placed some silver on it. It lingered before me. I had taken two shillings from my purse, but I grasped them tightly in my right hand, and placed my open left hand for an instant, palm upwards, upon the plate. I did not consider what any one else might think; at the moment, I thought only of him. He looked down into my upturned face, and an almost imperceptible expression of annoyance, disgust perhaps, swept over his own. He passed on, and I heard several ladies inquiring who that was, so noble-looking and so handsome.

"Why you didn't give anything, Miss Marples," said Mary Jane in an astonished whisper.

"I had nothing to give," I replied.

"But what did you put your hand so for? It looked so odd!"

"To let him understand that I had nothing."

We were compelled to sit still a long time,

during which this jingling of money went on, accompanied by a hum of voices. When Mrs. Wilton at length rejoined us, we moved with the crowd down stairs, passing, as we went, a group of gentlemen, among whom stood the Dean and Colonel Leigh.

"How handsome that dark, military man is," said one of the ladies who accompanied Mrs. Wilton. "It's the dean's nephew, Colonel Leigh."

"O ma," said Raymond, "Miss Marples *did* make that gentleman stare."

"Make him stare?" said Mrs. Wilton. "What do you mean?"

But there was no time for further conversation then; we got into our respective carriages, and drove home. Raymond had spoken out of his simple wonderment, and not with any thought of injuring me, but I foresaw that some trouble would arise out of the explanation. Great as was my horror of being asked if I had a father, the idea of him being identified was something worse, and altogether unbearable. I must get out of the scrape as well as I could.

I had been sitting for some time amongst the children, describing to them what I had seen, when Mary Jane and Raymond came up.

"Ma wants to see you, Miss Marples," said

Mary Jane, "and I believe she's cross with you for acting so, and not giving anything."

"I don't know what she should be cross for," said Raymond. "It amused me more than anything I saw."

I went down to Mrs. Wilton, who, as I expected, was exceedingly severe and polite.

"I have been greatly surprised, Miss Marples, by the account the children give of your conduct to-day. I think there must be a mistake."

"Not about my giving nothing," I said, "as I really had nothing to spare."

"That is very singular. But about placing your hand upon the plate?"

"I believe I did so in the confusion of the moment."

"Believe you did, and confusion of the moment! Do you mean to say you don't know what you're about? The people round you looking on, and such a great man as Colonel Leigh is, too,—it was quite dreadful—and such an insult to so noble a cause! I've often thought you an odd person, Miss Marples, but I never expected anything like this. All my friends will know it, for Raymond has told, and I consider it a discredit to the house. And then it really surprises me that you should be without money for ordinary purposes. I have allowed you every advantage, and

I think the least thing you can do is to keep up a respectable appearance in every way."

I ventured to mention my grandfather's affliction, and the probable consequences of it.

"Dear me," she said, "what is to become of you? and you wanting dresses, as I am sure you do. If you remain in my house, you must make a respectable appearance. I understood from your grandfather, when I engaged you, that if I provided you with a comfortable home he would do all the rest."

"I fear," I said, that my grandfather did not understand that I was to receive no salary."

"Well, you do astonish me now! Why, bless my life, it was as clearly understood as could be. I repeated my terms over and over again, so that there might be no mistake. But this is what I have always found—selfishness, nothing but selfishness in governesses! But this is scarcely being honest, and what I did not expect from *you,* Miss Marples, or that old person, your grandfather, who seemed to me to be quite respectable. Well, what's to be done? This is putting me out of the way dreadfully."

I expressed my full conviction that my grandfather could not supply me with clothes—that I should be compelled to earn them for myself.

"Then I must consider our engagement to be

at an end," said Mrs. Wilton. "As I engaged you for a permanency, as I supposed, we can say nothing about notice, though there is no occasion for you to go in a hurry. I suppose you can stop the week out."

I consented to do so, and sat down immediately to write to my grandfather. I was not quite sure that Mrs. Wilton was dealing unfairly with me. I had no recollection of her bargaining with my grandfather about supplying me with clothes; but I distinctly remembered that she had said nothing about giving me a salary. But considering how heavy my various duties were, and how faithfully I had discharged them, I could not help considering her conduct unjust, as well as mean. I had certainly expected something better, and I was overwhelmed by the difficulties of my situation. When I thought of my grandfather in his helpless state, and my own eager wish to cheer as well as assist him, my heart grew more bitter against this world, with its insolent assumptions of superiority, its base readiness to take advantage of necessity, its various and always mean and vulgar methods for the furthering of self-interest and the gratification of malice. If these, I said, are the good Christians of this land, God defend me from them!—from Christianity altogether, if it leads to nothing better than this: rather let me

be a heathen than live and die with no better prospect than that of herding for ever with these wolves, the legitimate representatives of a surely fabulous flock!

It was a strange idea to me, that of heaven being peopled with such souls as seemed to abound in the world. If there were any place of future punishment reserved for individuals like Uncle Stephen, I felt no doubt about preferring it, and I determined to prepare myself for it forthwith. As to the doctrine of non-resistance that my grandfather had taught me, how was it practicable, unless I consented to be crushed out of life altogether?

The young Wiltons, who possessed no strong feelings of any kind, exhibited no emotion at the prospect of losing me. I was only a governess, and governesses were plentiful enough, as they had some reason to know.

"I wonder what the next governess will be like," said little Alice. "I hope she won't be an ugly cross old thing."

"Pa says I shall go to a school, and he won't stand any more of ma's nonsense," said Raymond; "so I don't care."

This was all I heard from the children in reference to the subject. I was greatly exasperated with myself for allowing my heart to take an inte-

rest in those who did not want my regard—who, indeed, would only look upon it as a singularity, or a very great liberty. I had, however, become attached to the children, and it cost me a pang, though I would not acknowledge it, to wrench myself away.

One day, during Mrs. Wilton's absence, the servant desired me to go down to a lady, who had called upon her. I found her in the drawing-room, and she came forward to meet me. She was young, rather pretty, and very showily dressed, and I remembered her as one of those whom we had accompanied to the anti-slavery meeting.

"Is it true that you are about to leave Mrs. Wilton?" she asked.

I replied that it was.

"Then I want to ask a favour. When do you leave?"

"On Monday next."

"You have not obtained another situation?"

"No."

"This is my card. I wish you to call upon me on Wednesday morning. *Will* you call?"

I promised that I would.

"But, positively, you know. I am very earnest about it. You are quite sure you will come?"

I could not help smiling at this earnestness in a

very giddy sort of young lady. I promised faithfully to call.

"And don't say anything to Mrs. Wilton about it: mind that. Now don't forget; I shall be quite disappointed if you are not punctual."

I promised once more, and the lady tripped down to her carriage. On the card I read the name "Mrs. Bontoft, Laurel Grove, St. John's Wood." What could she want with me, she who could not have any children old enough to require teaching?

I had no great expectation from her or any one, and I was absorbed in my present regrets. I had received a long letter from my grandfather, in which he said Mrs. Wilton had not used me well, but he desired me to trust in God, and keep a good heart. I had asked him to send Jem for my boxes, as I could not afford a coach, and he now informed me that Mr. Chaundy had died four days ago, and that Jem was lying on the floor of his cellar, overwhelmed with grief, and refusing alike food and consolation. He promised to send another person for my boxes.

The intelligence of Mr. Chaundy's death grieved me greatly. When and where should we find another friend like him; so liberal in mind, so warm in feeling, so disinterested, so altogether free from the hypocrisy and the cant of this world?

All kinds of trouble seemed to be following upon us at once, and on whatever side I looked, the prospect filled me with dismay.

On the appointed Monday, Mrs. Wilton took a very polite leave of me. A strange man brought Jem's truck, and my grandfather himself joined me in the street. I had not seen him for nearly five months; for so fearful had we all been of my giving offence by even a short absence from my duties, that I had not asked for a day's holiday. I was again struck by a great change in him. More wasted than ever, bent nearly double, and with his poor eyes telling their own tale, it almost broke my heart to look upon him. "O my God!" I said mentally, "Thou teachest me that I do not exist alone by this body, for if I did not possess a soul capable of loathing and resisting the cruelty of this earth, the misery upon which I look would overwhelm me,—I should lie down at once and die!"

Aunt Betsy, too, had grown more gaunt and sallow.

"My eyes are not to be trusted," said my grandfather, "but this child is looking very ill, isn't she, sister?"

"She's paler and thinner," said Aunt Betsy, "but that was sure to be the case, living in London. You musn't dishearten her."

Aunt Betsy set a good example throughout our troubles, by striving to make the best of everything. I had learned that my grandfather had been compelled to give up writing altogether, that Aunt Betsy went out nearly every day to such hard labour as she could find, leaving him alone till late at night; and that the two subsisted upon her labour. What a life! I began to wonder if people felt as I did when they were going mad. I could not pray to God, for I could not believe that these heavy afflictions were for our good; and I turned with deep loathing from the world of which I had already seen too much.

But my spirit was too active and energetic to be kept down long. I saw that something must be done, and done speedily. I had at least learned a lesson,—I would not again drudge for any one without understanding what was to be the reward of my labour, and I determined to seek some other kind of employment. Henceforth I would work with my hands instead of my head, and remain at home (what a home!) if possible. I mentioned this, and my desire to obtain needlework. Aunt Betsy shook her head. She said there were hundreds of needlewomen starving, however she would go with me to the shops and we would try.

"If I cannot obtain work of that kind, Aunt

Betsy," I said, "I will go out and labour as you do."

"With those little, delicate hands?" said Aunt Betsy. "Nobody would think you worth hiring that looked at them; and besides, they wouldn't serve you for such work as mine. You must do something else."

My grandfather took one of my hands in his as Aunt Betsy spoke, and stroked it fondly. "My poor, poor child!" he said, "I hoped to have done better for you. You believe I always wished to do the best, don't you?"

"Don't speak in that way, grandfather," I said, throwing my arms round his neck, "you'll break my heart!"

"Come, we mustn't have any breaking of hearts," said Aunt Betsy. "There's plenty beside us in trouble, and we must do as they do,—make the best of it. I promised Jem that you should come and see him, Margaret."

"Yes, poor fellow!" said my grandfather, "you must go and see him. We must not forget them that are in affliction. I'll put my hat on, and we'll walk there together, now."

It was an evening in September, and the daylight was just going out. In the dingy court where we lived, with its tall, crowded houses, it was dark enough. Offensive sights and smells,

and language such as I had never heard anywhere before, disgusted me, and made me shrink into myself as I passed. No wonder at the world setting its face against poverty, if these were its natural products—dirt, and squalor, and ugliness, and depravity. Was there no remedy for all this? No wonder that these loathsome objects were not considered to form a part of the agreeable company destined to make up the assembly in heaven!

As we were passing out of the court my grandfather stumbled against something, and we drew back. A dirty-looking man, with a short pipe in his mouth, drew up and kicked with his foot at the obstruction, which proved to be a woman lying at full length upon the ground.

"Now Molly," said the man, "you just get up, and don't be a-blocking up the road this ways."

The woman groaned.

"I wish I was in the churchyard grave," she said.

"Is she ill?" asked my grandfather.

"Only got a drop too much," said the man.

"You're a big liar!" screamed the woman. "What's left me but the drink to fly to?—an' I can't get it. Holy mother! how they forget me up yonder, an' I so wantin' to die!"

"God help you!" said my grandfather; "do you feel fit to die, and go into the presence of your God?"

"Is it me?" said the woman; "Wouldn't I be thankful to get anywhere out of this? Don't I wish I'd be a corpse this blessed minit?"

"Are you a Roman Catholic?"

"I'm that same, blessed be God."

"Is there no one to look after this poor creature?" said my grandfather, addressing the man.

"The pollis 'll be looking arter her, if she don't take herself off," said the man. "Lord bless you, it's all a sham what she says; she only talks in that way when she's drunk."

"Don't believe that black heretic!" screamed the woman; "the curse of Saint Patrick light on him!"

It was impossible to pass the narrow entry without stepping over the woman, and we drew back, shocked and bewildered.

"Them Irish," said the man, "is the only ones about us as talks about religion, an' it don't seem to do 'em much good: they can curse the heretics. It's a queer start, is religion. Now you just let the gentlefolks pass. Here, Bill, lend us a hand."

Bill, who swore awfully, assisted the other to

drag the woman out of the way. The language of the three, and the woman's screams, completely horrified me. What a peaceful home we had quitted for these scenes of turmoil and deep shame!

I felt my grandfather's arm tremble upon mine. I imagined all that was passing in his mind,—the distress that such a scene of itself would occasion him; the anguish he would feel, knowing that he might not be able to shut out from me many like exhibitions of depravity. I spoke to him of other matters,—of Mr. Chaundy, whom he had seen a few days before his death, when he had spoken of me with much interest.

"Mr. Chaundy knew the world better than I do," said my grandfather; "he told me months ago that Mrs. Wilton would serve you as she did, and he wished me to speak to her again; but I had better hopes. Well, well."

We stood before Jem's squalid cellar. It was under a marine-store shop, and we descended to it by three dirty steps. My grandfather knocked at the door, and opened it just as a very forlorn-looking woman, fluttering in rags, came forward from the interior.

"He's there, poor creeter," said the woman, pointing on our inquiry to where Jem lay, huddled up on a heap of straw. "I've just stepped

in to clean up a bit; for he's a'most lost, an' nobody to look arter him."

A thought struck me at the moment. Does He who is no respecter of persons dive into these dens of filth and squalor in search of gems of great price, and find them?—hearts like this woman's, for instance, in the right place? It was only a passing idea that heaven would be more desirable if the company were thus select.

"It is very good of you to look after him a little," said my grandfather.

"I don't know about that," said the woman. It comes nat'ral to us poor folks to help one another. God help us, if it warn't so. I'll step in again, Jem, presently; an' now you jist get up an' be talked to."

And with a delicacy of feeling that showed in her as well as it would have done in a duchess, the forlorn creature walked out.

"Now, Jem," said my grandfather, "how are you? Look up and speak to us;—here's my grand-daughter come to see you."

"Speak to me, Jem, for old times' sake. I have not seen you so long," I said.

"Them's jist the words he spoke to me that blessed mornin' afore he died," said Jem, raising his head. "'Jem,' says he, 'I've not seen that young gal as they're makin' a slave on yonder

for a long while. I'd give a good deal, Jem,' he said, 'if I could help her afore I die.' O Lord, he did!" And Jem sank down and buried his head in the straw again.

I was about to speak to him further, but a choking sensation in my throat stopped me. My thoughts wandered back to that poor prisoner who had thought of me in his dying hours, and the tears sprang to my eyes, for I felt that I had lost one friend whose place might not be supplied readily.

"We must consider, Jem," said my grandfather, after a short pause, "that what we regret so much may be for our friend's benefit. He may have exchanged an earthly prison for a heavenly habitation. Let us not be selfish; I think,—I hope,—we have reason to rejoice."

"O Lord! if they had only made a bishop on him!" said Jem, in a passionate burst of grief; "if they'd only a put him in a palace as I wasn't let come anear: I should a seen him somewhere, but now I shall never see him nowhere—never; never! never!"

"In heaven, Jem," said my grandfather, placing his hand on Jem's arm, for he sat on a low stool at his side; "in heaven!"

There was silence again. I looked round the wretched place in which I sat, the floor of which

appeared to be bare earth. There were two ricketty stools, higher than that on which my grandfather was seated; a block of wood, that seemed to serve for a table; a bundle of rags in one corner and Jem's truck in another; a few cracked mugs and plates on a shelf; a tumble-down fireplace, with a piece of rusty bent iron for a fender,—nothing more, except a small candle guttering over a bottle. It was a sublime thought, that of this poor creature being translated from such a place to heaven!

And why not? O God!—O Earth! the defiled and the undefiled! how my spirit wavered between them! I felt the power of the world weakening, and my old faith coming back to me in scenes like these, that afforded me glimpses of a final and glorious retribution. I could annihilate the dark gulf between, over which I also was called upon to pass.

"Jem, look up," said my grandfather; "this is sinful; it is very weak and foolish too; look up, and be a man, and trust in God. You used to say you found a little life amongst us yonder."

"So I did, and so I do," said Jem, raising his head again. "Didn't that blessed creeter say to me, 'Jem, don't lose sight on 'em; help 'em if you can!' Didn't he? Lor' bless you, I know!"

"Well, you *shall* help us. You see, we shall look upon you as a sort of legacy from our old friend, and we shan't be able to get on without you. Then we can talk together about him, Jem."

"Yes, I see," said Jem, sitting up and rubbing his hands together, slowly. "That's what he said to me;—'You'll often talk about me, Jem; you an' them,' says he. O Lord! if I could only tell you all he said!"

By degrees we brought Jem into a quieter and more resigned state between us, and when we rose to go he got up too, and said in his natural manner: "I must go an' see if there's any coal wantin' yonder;" and thinking it would help to rouse him, my grandfather allowed him to accompany us.

I had thought so little about Mrs. Bontoft that I did not produce her card or mention her request till the following day. My grandfather thought it was quite right to call upon her, and on Wednesday morning we set out together.

We had not apprised Jem of our journey, knowing that he would insist upon showing the way, and so neglecting his own affairs. We made inquiries about the situation of St. John's Wood, and were advised to take an omnibus as far as Upper Baker Street, in the New Road, which we

did. We then inquired our way, and found it pretty readily; and suddenly there came to us the welcome breath of a purer air, and we had a glimpse; of green fields and the houses, surrounded by their gardens, seemed perfect elysiums.

We found "Laurel Grove" at last, and a beautiful place it was. The house and grounds were inclosed by a high wall, and there was a lodge at the gate. I left my grandfather walking about, and approached the gate and rang the bell. A woman admitted me, and told me to go on to the house, which was approached by a fragrant shrubbery. At the house a footman opened the door, and upon learning my errand told me to walk forward. He led me into a very luxurious drawing-room whose windows opened upon a lawn. Here were seated Mrs. Bontoft and two other ladies; and a stout, elderly gentleman in a showy dressing-gown stood with his back to the fire.

"Oh, I'm so glad you've come!" said Mrs. Bontoft; "sit here by me, I want to talk to you. So you've left Mrs. Wilton?"

I said I had.

"Now, if you won't think me too inquisitive, I should like to know what salary she gave you."

"I had no salary."

"There! I always said so!" exclaimed Mrs. Bontoft, clapping her hands. "Oh, the shabby woman! And she did not tell you till the last thing, that you were to have nothing?"

"I certainly expected some salary though none had been specified; and I was surprised when she told me that she thought I had understood that I was not to receive any from the first."

There was a chorus of exclamations from the ladies about Mrs. Wilton's shabbiness. The gentleman stood with his hands behind him, smiling blandly, but saying nothing.

"I always hated that Mrs. Wilton for her mean ways," said Mrs. Bontoft. "Nobody knows what I've endured from her. I cannot call my carriage my own, and when she comes to the house there's no getting rid of her. An ugly, tiresome old thing! Now I shall take this young person's part, and have a quarrel with her. I quite admired your spirit, Miss Marples, in acting as you did at the meeting: it was capital!"

And the two ladies said it was capital, and talked a great deal about it, and the gentleman chuckled with suppressed laughter; and I found to my surprise that my exhibition of an empty hand had been construed into a satire on Mrs.

Wilton's meanness. It seemed to strike all present as something very piquant and clever, and as there was no escaping the applause showered upon me, I bore it as well as I could.

"Now, Miss Marples," said Mrs. Bontoft, when she seemed at length to have talked and laughed herself out of breath, "I am in want of a sort of companion, and I think you will suit me. My husband here, Mr. Bontoft, likes to see young and pretty faces about him, so you will suit *him*. (Here the gentleman on the hearthrug chuckled again, and swayed backwards and forwards on his feet.) *I* shall not think of engaging you without a salary, shall I, Poppy?"

"What's the use?" exclaimed Mr. Bontoft, the individual appealed to, lifting his right leg and poising it in the air. I thought this brief sentence promised very unfavourably, and my eyes had just dropped from his face to the floor when "What's the use?" repeated in a louder key caused me to look up again. The gentleman now stood upon his right leg and held the left in the air, and in a few seconds he strode hastily across the floor, saying quite hurriedly:—"What's the use of having money if you don't make yourselves happy?"

This was a peculiarity of Mr. Bontoft's, as I found afterwards.

"After the heavy task-work you have been used to," said Mrs. Bontoft,—"teaching, making, mending, and doing heaven knows what, at Mrs. Wilton's, you will have an easy time with me. I shall give you twenty-five pounds a year; and as she must have put you very much about by making you work for nothing, I will pay you a quarter in advance. Poppy, give me a five-pound note."

Poppy put his finger and thumb in his waistcoat pocket and drew forth what appeared to me several pieces of dirty paper.

"What's the use," he said, throwing them before Mrs. Bontoft and raising his right leg; "what's the use," he continued, lifting the other, "what's the use of having money if you don't make yourselves happy?"

"Seeing Mrs. Bontoft really about giving me the quarter's salary in advance, I roused myself to speak, for though I had no objection to this abrupt mode of engaging me, and the money was very tempting, I did not feel quite sure about my qualifications for the place.

"You are very kind," I said, "and I would gladly accept your offer, if I could feel more assured that I should be able to give satisfaction. If I understood better what duties were required of me——"

"Oh, you are quite competent to anything I shall impose upon you," said Mrs. Bontoft, interrupting me. "You speak French charmingly. I know you play well; you can read correctly. If I want to make a milliner and dressmaker of you," she continued, laughing, "I know you will not be at fault *there*. Come, it's a settled thing; I've quite set my mind on it. When do you think you can come to us?"

I said I should like to have a few days to prepare myself.

"Then suppose we say next Monday?"

The day suited me, and it was agreed upon.

"Now make yourself quite happy," said Mr. Bontoft, approaching the table. "Take a glass of wine and a biscuit," and he handed me both.

"Ah, you will find a difference betwixt being here and at Mrs. Wilton's," said one of the ladies. "Both Mr. and Mrs. Bontoft *must* make everybody comfortable about them."

"What's the use," commenced Mr. Bontoft, and he finished his speech in the usual way.

"It isn't every one that makes so wise a use of their money, more's the pity," said the other lady.

Mrs. Bontoft placed the money in my hand, but I felt a hesitation about taking it. I dreaded nothing so much as being asked to give my

address, yet I could not, for the life of me, help saying—

"I am almost entirely a stranger to you, madam; you do not even know where I live."

"Oh, I am entirely satisfied about that," said Mrs. Bontoft; "I know more than you imagine. I know that if you had had parents to protect you, or if your grandfather had not been poor, Mrs. Wilton would not have taken the advantage she did; that makes it the more shameful. You will not find *me* taking such advantage. Make yourself quite easy, Miss Marples. We shall expect you on the Monday, and now, good morning."

"Don't ring the bell," said Mr. Bontoft; "come with me, my dear, and I'll show you through the garden."

I took leave of the ladies, who were all smiles and politeness, and followed him through a glass door out upon the lawn.

"Pretty place, aint it?" he said, looking round him, and seeming to me in a state of intense enjoyment of the present.

"It is very beautiful, indeed," I said.

"You like beautiful things, eh? so do I. I've money, and I like to enjoy myself. We've flowers, you see, nearly all the year round. Are you fond of flowers?"

"Yes, very."

He plucked a rose, and presented it to me.

"'The last rose of summer,'" he said; "sweets to the sweet," bowing very politely. "I hope we shall be a happy little company when you come; nothing like enjoying ourselves whilst we can. Good morning."

The woman who had admitted me stood at the lodge door; she came forward and opened the gate, and I passed out. I rejoined my grandfather immediately, and had to give an account of the interview while its details were yet fresh upon me. I managed this so as to leave a more favourable impression on his mind than I had myself received, though I omitted much that, perhaps, ought to have gratified me. The bare facts of having been engaged at once, and cared for so thoughtfully, and trusted so implicitly, told well; but much of what I had seen and heard, the very excess of kindness and politeness, inspired me with distrust. It seemed to me that, dislike of Mrs. Wilton and a desire to be rid of her, perhaps to gratify a little vanity by the display of strong contrasts, rather than any real interest in myself, had led to my good fortune. Then I could not help shrinking from these people who avowedly enjoyed life so much, and evidently prided themselves on the power of obtaining the

good things of this world, and who exacted the obedience that was for their especial gratification so confidently, though with a show of kindness. I was rather an odd subject to contribute to the already abundant enjoyment of fortune's favourites; and I could only expect to flourish on the uncertain tenure of a caprice likely to be brief in proportion to its violence.

However, an unsubstantial good might be preferable to the hard, coarse reality of evil; and certainly, whatever her motive, or whatever the end might be, Mrs. Bontoft had conferred a present benefit upon me. I thought I could perform wonders with the salary she offered me, for, good arithmetician as I was, I was too little experienced in the spending of money to know how far a certain sum would go in providing the necessaries of life. After a few days, however, during which I made some addition to my wardrobe, it became clear to me that in order to dress well, which I might more than ever be required to do, the twenty-five pounds might easily be spent upon myself, especially if I had my washing to pay for; and, in the course of my reflections, I found that I had again made a bargain without any clear understanding of the terms. These discoveries filled me with dismay, for the mere providing for myself was a secondary matter to me.

I wished to be near my grandfather; I had determined not to leave him again unless I was allowed to minister to his wants; and I was angry with myself for having been so readily hurried into an engagement that, however well it promised for me, offered no chance of my helping others. I could not calmly contemplate a life of bodily ease and mental torture; I knew that I should not thrive upon luxuries with this ever-present thought of the hard and scanty fare provided for those I loved, if indeed they got that;—this was not what I had wanted, and the thoughts of my heart became yet more bitter;—it was not much I asked from God or from the world, and it seemed hard that the apparently fairest offer I had yet met with should only promise to be productive of misery.

It was an aggravation of my trouble to see what confidence and high hope my account of these people had inspired in my grandfather. He attributed to true Christian feeling what I regarded as an eccentric ebullition of selfishness, and his ready trust in human goodness, while it excited my pity, weakened his influence over me still more, making me feel myself the protector rather than the protected, the teacher rather than the taught. For how much I had learned during my brief intercourse with the world, that it would

have been hard for him to comprehend,—still harder to believe,—and how rapidly in that world had faded away the lessons he taught me in my solitude! Had I yet met with any whose actions and motives, like his, seemed to be governed solely by the precepts of Christ?

These contradictory teachings and experiences wearied me in the midst of other distracting cares and thoughts. The burden of a mortal life seemed enough to struggle and provide for, with every man's hand against me; and I felt that if I, too, did not become a self-seeker, I could only make up my mind to let these Christian people crush me down altogether.

I saw a good deal of Jem during the few days I was at home. God knows how he lived: he said it kept him alive to talk about Mr. Chaundy. That gentleman's few possessions, such as his clothes and books, had been seized in prison for a debt contracted there, and Jem had no relic of him except a lock of hair, which he kept about his person. A rich relation, who had neglected Mr. Chaundy in life, came forward to bury him, and except that he was missed by us and Jem, he seemed to have left no void in the world. His fate affected me very much, as an illustration of individual nothingness. After a few years of suffering so also should we pass away, only more

obscurely, and leaving fewer traces of a previous existence behind us. I learned from my aunt that our affairs were desperate enough, the little my grandfather brought with him being exhausted: but she spoke cheeringly of being able to maintain both by her own labour if she could get constant work. I could only resolve to expend as little of my salary as possible on myself; but when the Monday morning arrived I set out for "Laurel Grove" with a heavy heart.

Mr. Bontoft's was a model establishment for this world. Nothing offensive to the ear or eye was allowed to come near it. The servants were all young and comely; the contrivances for ease and pleasure were complete; the furniture and decorations, the eating and drinking, the constant plans for amusement, and the daily habits of both master and mistress, all displayed a craving for luxuriousness. It was shown in the richly carpeted and curtained and cushioned pew at Marylebone Church, where I had the honour of offering up my prayers in the company of Mr. and Mrs. Bontoft, of handling bibles and prayer-books clasped and rivetted with gold and blazoned with the Bontoft arms. I could not complain of my treatment any way, because, as the lady had said, Mr. and Mrs. Bontoft *must* have everybody comfortable about them. And it was not a bad

idea either, that of the general depending upon individual comfort; and the plan worked well at Laurel Grove, where everyone looked happy and satisfied, and where all seemed alike eager to enjoy the good things provided for them. It seemed almost sinful to bring a murmuring heart into such a place. I could not, for some time, help wondering what Mrs. Bontoft wanted with me, as she kept a maid, and required few services from me herself. Days passed on and I did literally nothing, except read the paper to Mr. Bontoft, or help him to garden, or play till he fell asleep, whilst Mrs. Bontoft was out visiting. I learned that he was a retired merchant, immensely rich, who having no children or near relations, determined to have out of the world his money's worth of satisfaction for himself. And a happy man he was, altogether, because he could not believe that there was such a thing as real misery in the world. If people liked to work, he said, (and he had himself worked successfully the greater part of his life), there was plenty to do; if they liked to be idle, society provided the workhouse for them.

"Anything so that you'll make yourselves happy," said Mr. Bontoft, apostrophising the word generally. "Please yourselves, and we shall get on capitally."

It was true that accidents would occur in the best regulated world, but Mr. Bontoft subscribed to hospitals, dispensaries, and other public charities; and having performed his own part of duty so far, he had a comfortable assurance of all the ills of life being well provided for. Nothing could be kinder than Mr. Bontoft's manner in his household; he had pet names for nearly every one. His wife was "moonface," I was "the little fawn," the coachman was "the white bear," and a smart housemaid "the mouse." He liked, too, to include others in all his schemes for self-gratification. He would ask me, for instance, if there was anything I should particularly like for dinner or lunch; but though I was aware that a gastronomic idea would not have been thrown away upon him, I could make nothing of it. I always sat at table with themselves, and never was excluded when they had company. Sometimes I went out in the carriage with both of them, more frequently with Mrs. Bontoft alone, until she had exhibited me amongst all her acquaintances, and repeated, till I was sick of hearing it, the story of my ill-usage at Mrs. Wilton's.

The throng of visitors at Laurel Grove made much of me as a favourite, but I only shared their caresses with Mrs. Bontoft's French poodle. In many asides I was told what a happy creature

I ought to consider myself in the possession of such kind friends. To be sure Mr. and Mrs. Bontoft were very discriminating: no doubt I was deserving of their patronage. I was certainly handsome and accomplished, and gave every promise of being a comfort and a credit to my benefactors. And why was I unhappy, even apart from the thought of home? All this was not to my taste: I could have gloried in the hardest fare and the rudest accommodation, with independence. Here I had not the satisfaction of feeling that I was earning my daily bread. I felt, in fact, that I had been engaged for the double purpose of displaying an ostentatious liberality, and getting rid of Mrs. Wilton. How long would these people, so accustomed to self-gratification, bear with me if their humour changed?

Then there was no depth in the feeling about me, kind as it seemed. These people, so lavish of their favours, would have been horrified if I had spoken of Aunt Betsy's drudgery and my grandfather's distress, and my own wish to help them as much as possible. And amidst all this generosity and profusion, there seemed no chance of helping them. A heap of drapery and millinery goods arrived one morning for Mrs. Bontoft's inspection, and from them she selected two dresses and some other articles for myself.

"We must have you nicely dressed," she said, "and you need not mind paying for them now. I will keep an account."

Besides knowing that I really stood in no need of these things—that I had plenty of clothing suited to my station—I had the additional mortification of being compelled to wear a costume offensive to me, on account of its gaudy colouring, and likely to entail further expense, because I had nothing to match with it. Aunt Betsy had excellent taste in dress: she could make the commonest and plainest material look genteel and becoming; and, perhaps, from her I inherited my liking for quietness in attire. It was a real trouble to me to be dressed up like a doll, especially as it was to be at my own expense. I remembered hearing Uncle Stephen say that he could guess at the temper of a woman's mind by the way in which she dressed herself at different periods of her life. What was to be said of those who, like myself, acted under coercion? Fashion, the most arbitrary of all tyrants, would drag along with it the timid and the sensitive, who would shrink from any appearance of singularity; as for me, I was no better than Mrs. Bontoft's French poodle, that submitted to a beautifying process every morning.

With all his money and skill in making the

most of it, Mr. Bontoft could not have everything his own way. He was subject to frequent attacks of gout, that confined him to the house; and at such times I found enough to do, as he required a deal of waiting upon; and the task of amusing him fell entirely upon myself. Mrs. Bontoft visited and attended parties as usual, and I began to perceive that I was not quite so useless as I had supposed myself to be.

Autumn passed away, and the winter months set in, and there were great preparations for the Christmas festivities. I was one morning seated in the drawing-room with Mr. Bontoft during his wife's absence on a visiting expedition. He had just recovered from an attack, and was, as usual, anxious to make up for lost time; and it was wonderful how many little contrivances he had for self-enjoyment. I was reading to him in a new comic annual, and he laughed heartily.

"I say, Little Fawn," he exclaimed, suddenly, "give me a glass of wine. Moonface won't be home to lunch, and we must enjoy ourselves as well as we can. What shall we have?"

I suggested several dishes that I knew he was partial to.

"Cooky shall warm us that hare soup; just the thing for this raw day. Skip into the kitchen, like a little fawn as you are, and tell her."

I went to the kitchen and delivered the message. On my return I found Mr. Bontoft, standing where I left him, on the hearth-rug, with his back to the fire; but his usually smiling face wore a wrathful expression; he seemed, indeed, in too great a rage to speak, and pointed with his hand to one of the windows. There, in the midst of the hoar-frost that hardened the ground, and whitened over the bare branches and the evergreens, exposed to the biting blast and the inclement sky, stood a miserably clad woman and two half-naked children, all shivering, and all casting a mute, appealing look upon Mr. Bontoft, as he luxuriated over the fire.

"Isn't this too bad?" he exclaimed, in a state of excitement. "Isn't it dreadful? Anything like this happening at Laurel Grove! Good God!"

I thought his horror was occasioned by the contemplation of so much misery, and that, if only for his own comfort, he would be compelled to give something.

"Shall I," I commenced—I was about to say, "shall I go out and speak to them;" but he interrupted me hastily.

"Of course,—to be sure,—directly. Tell John to take a horsewhip to them. Bless my life," he continued, ringing the bell violently, "what an

infliction this is! what can be the meaning of it?"

The meaning seemed pretty clear to me; but what he had said confused me, and I stood, not knowing what to do, when John entered.

"What are you all about?" said Mr. Bontoft, again pointing to the window; "what do I maintain a lodge for? Look there, sir!"

"Lor' a marcy!" said John, in evident dismay, "how did they come anear?"

He disappeared like a shot, and I soon saw him outside, driving the poor creatures before him.

"Give me another glass of wine," said Mr. Bontoft; "this is enough to spoil a man's appetite for a month! You see how well-disposed I am to be comfortable myself, and to make everybody about me the same; but what's to be done where other people neglect their duty? I assure you the man at the lodge and his wife had strict orders from the first not to admit anything of that kind. I shall be sorry to be severe, but I must look after them."

Mr. Bontoft seated himself in an arm-chair, and sipped his wine. I bent over the comic book and thought of the misery that had just been driven from this abode of luxurious plenty. I wondered if I could be more of a slave than I was, compelled to hide every feeling, and fashion

my very looks, so that they might not give offence to my employers. What was I learning from these Christians, to whose teaching my grandfather resigned me without a fear, after tearing me from the companionship of Uncle Stephen?"

"What's the use," exclaimed Mr. Bontoft; for he was on his legs again, and he finished his speech in the usual way, the last word bringing him to my side.

"I say," he said, bending over me, "have you got a sweetheart?"

"No, sir."

"Have you never had one?"

"No, sir."

"What a shame! How do you like Captain Phipps?"

"Not much, sir."

"Not much; that means a great deal in the mouth of a young lady. Well, I have it from Walker that Captain Phipps admires you vastly."

"I am sorry to hear it, sir; but you have surely been misinformed."

"Ha! ha! what odd ways women have of beating about the bush! Come, now, you can't help being gratified by the admiration of Captain Phipps; everybody admires *him*. I have an inclination to help you up in the world, and I don't

know if this isn't an opening; I'll talk to Moonface about it."

I had a decided aversion to Captain Phipps, who seemed to come to the house whenever he liked. He always addressed me with the unrestrained familiarity that, in a young man, and a superior, was as impertinent as anything could well be. I begged that Mr. Bontoft would not think of him in connexion with myself.

"Oh, say no more about it," said Mr. Bontoft; "*I* know! Bless you, I never met with a young girl that didn't say exactly the reverse of what she meant in a love affair in my life. Now, I won't hear another word: let's have lunch."

From what I had seen of young girls, I could believe that what Mr. Bontoft said was true. Affectation and insincerity were not incompatible with boldness; and for these sins of my sex I must expect to suffer. Perhaps there was a better way than my own of getting out of this dilemma; but who was to teach it me? I began to have an idea that another storm was preparing for me.

In the first place, Mrs. Bontoft, young and gay, and showily handsome, was herself accustomed to receive the homage of Captain Phipps. Then nothing could be more monstrous than the idea of his entertaining any serious thought of

me. Mr. Bontoft's foolish meddling might set his wife against me, or convert me into a laughing-stock, for I had seen enough of the world's aptitude at twisting the truth to believe it quite possible that the idea of the man's admiration might eventually be discovered to have originated with myself. Oh, my God, forgive me, how I hated these people! How, above all others, I loathed that Captain Phipps, who, under his easy assurance possessed—I was sure of it—all the cold-blooded villany and disdainful pride of Colonel Leigh: why was I so beset—not with temptations, but with horrors, that made life a burden to me, go where I would?

Mr. Bontoft was as good as his word, and talked to Moonface about it that day at dinner.

"Bless me!" she said, turning and looking me full in the face, "this *is* news! Whatever has the Captain been saying to you?"

I assured her that the Captain had said nothing particular to me; that Mr. Bontoft's communication had surprised me equally with herself.

"O Poppy," she said, "you must act with more discretion! Only think of offending Captain Phipps by letting him see you entertained such a notion,—so absurd! And I trust, Miss Marples, you will give no encouragement to young men of his rank in my house: you must

be aware that it would lead to nothing creditable."

I assured her that nothing would be further from my thoughts than giving such encouragement, if I had the opportunity, and I thanked her for placing the subject in a right light before Mr. Bontoft. I might further have assured her, that if Captain Phipps could so far forget himself and my poverty and insignificance as to make me an offer of his hand, I should certainly refuse it at once, for many reasons independent of my utter contempt for himself. Several months before, I had formed a resolution to pass through the world alone; I would not bring to any one the dower of my own disgrace; I would not perpetuate it; I had sufficient pride to sustain me through a solitary life, and this would not allow me to fail in self-respect. I lifted my head high above these people by whom I was despised; I exulted in the knowledge that they could not bring me down to their own level.

From this day I was made painfully aware that Mrs. Bontoft regarded me with jealous dislike. In company she took great pains to make others as well as myself aware of my dependent state and obscure origin, expatiating not very delicately on her own generosity in rescuing me from destitution, and ostentatiously promising her

protection so long as I deserved it. This led to further congratulations from the visitors, flattering to Mrs. Bontoft, but charged with the bitterness of the fruit of the tree of knowledge to myself.

In the midst of all this, the conviction was forced upon me that Captain Phipps was seriously inclined to make himself more hateful, and to prove a further annoyance to me. Supposing that his approaches to myself were in conformity with established custom between a superior and inferior where nothing "serious" was meant, it was sufficiently astonishing to an unsophisticated woman how all the misery and shame that desolates so many homes could be brought about. Astonishing that the natural pride, and delicacy, and resentment of womanhood did not rise up at once, and with indomitable power put down the insolent pretension, and base purpose, and inordinate vanity, and hold up to a scorn that should be everlasting, the vileness that can trample upon all that should be sacred, and make a boast of the achievement. If I were here doubly armed, I did not escape without my share of suffering. With Mrs. Bontoft's eyes always upon me, I had to repel the Captain's advances as well as I could, and he contrived to make this a difficult matter. If our eyes chanced to meet, he would smile in a

significant manner, as if there were some secret intelligence between us; if I were told to play, he fastened himself at my side; turning over the leaves of the music-book, whispering extravagant commendations, and, occasionally pressing his foot upon mine, staring me impudently in the face all the time. When we met or parted, he would extend his hand where he knew I could not well refuse mine, and squeeze my fingers till the blood retreated. If any delicately nurtured and proud beauty, whose position places her out of the reach of such indignity, should think lightly of the delicacy that could submit to all this, I can only say, that never did indignation burn more fiercely in any soul than it did in mine while yet I knew not how to give vent to it. I could not tell how Mrs. Bontoft might receive a complaint of these freedoms, and the man had said nothing positively to call for interference. There were plenty ready to stand up in his defence; and I shrank from the idea of incurring a charge of having falsely interpreted liberties that from him to me might be considered too trifling for notice.

And that vast difference between him and me—my God! in what did it consist? Through many long and sleepless nights I wandered about my room, asking of heaven or earth an answer to

this question. To what purpose was I endowed with a reasonable sense of what was right and wrong, if circumstances were continually to keep me down, and choke my utterance, and compel my acquiescence in what I knew to be evil? And if these outbursts of feeling ended as they began, in a dogged sense of my own helplessness, they left behind them a lurking belief that the fierce storm gathering in my soul would some day scatter the humiliating restraints of my position, and set me free.

No matter about the terms of the freedom, I thought then. God help me! I had not yet become familiar with starvation, or with the tender mercies of parish dignitaries. I was yet a novice in this old world's ways for grinding souls into the dust!

In one respect it was well for me that I had sufficient causes of dissatisfaction. I was in danger of being infected by the habits of uncontrolled indulgence, and the luxurious ease about me: I had a craving desire for the beautiful, and a life of elegant leisure suited me very well. I should have been inclined to overrate the privilege of lying down in pleasant places, and to leave them with regret if I had not been constantly reminded that I was an intruder, and admonished sternly on the folly of cultivating tastes that could

only dissatisfy me further with the uncertainties and the dependencies to which I was born. I was further protected from besetting weakness by a restlessness of spirit for which a life of ease and indulgence offered no adequate scope; and at all times I seemed to hold a mysterious communication with the future, as if a spiritually visible hand was beckoning me onward, and compelling obedience to its movements. This feeling of always waiting for something that must be arrived at, whether I desired it or not, never left me in the darkest days of my trial; and if it did not supply me with an incentive to live on, it did the next best thing, — of proving that my time was not yet come to lie down and die.

Another weary month passed on, and one morning, late in January, I was left alone, Mr. and Mrs. Bontoft having gone out together. I was in a despondent mood, for Aunt Betsy's letters had of late assumed a sadder tone (my grandfather was now altogether incapable of writing); and knowing her propensity for making the best of everything, my imagination readily supplied what she had left unsaid. I began to loathe the luxury by which I was surrounded, the leisure that was filled up with bitter thoughts. Conscience brought back to me the many hours during which I had indulged a selfish forgetful-

ness in the present: and I felt that I had committed a mistake when I last left my relations to bear their hard struggle alone. I thought of my grandfather, nearly blind, and left to himself all day, and of Aunt Betsy returning to him at night after a hard day of toil. I had now tried to make a living out of my acquirements during more than twelve months, and I found myself worse off than at the beginning. Worse, because my stock of clothes was diminishing, and I had literally not been able to save a penny. I felt that if I could obtain needlework, and remain at home with my grandfather, I should be at once happier and more useful: and this idea fastening itself upon me, I sat down to write to Aunt Betsy, explaining to her why my present mode of life was altogether profitless, and imploring leave to return home. I was so absorbed that I did not hear the drawing-room door open, nor was I aware of any one approaching until a hand was placed upon my shoulder, and I instinctively shrank away from it.

"I'm in luck to-day, upon my soul," said Captain Phipps, seating himself beside me on the sofa. "You betwitching little cweater! how coolly you have looked on, witnessing my agonies, when you must have known that I was dying to speak to you! Come, that twaddling old fellow

and his fussy wife cannot overhear us, and you must listen to me or I shall go distwacted, positively."

I had risen up and moved my papers away. I stirred no farther than to the extreme end of the table. I, too, had something to say, and I was rather pleased than otherwise to have this opportunity of giving utterance to the scorn and indignation that seemed to ooze out of every pore in my body. I felt myself too well armed against this pigmy assailant to speak irritably.

"And what have you got to say that may not be uttered before your friends?" I asked. "What is it that you so confidently expect *me* to listen to? Do not let me disconcert you: speak on. There is no one to overhear us, as you say,—not even God; for who in these days believes in the existence of a God? Besides, you are a soldier, and ought to be brave; and I am poor and dependent, and you need not fear me. You see I am quite ready to listen."

"Upon my soul you are a stwange girl," said Captain Phipps; "but I like a woman of spirit. I hate dolls. And you are quite right: let us come to the point at once; that's my way always. You know I adore you. I have told you so fifty times over without speaking. Now I'll tell you what I'll do for you. I'll dwive you down to

Bwighton, four in hand, and you shall dwess as you like, and have jewellery, and hold your head above them all. Hang it! when I first saw you, I felt there was a what-d'ye-call-em—a sort of congeniality between us. Come now, be a complying angel. These people are making a slave of you. With me you shall have your own way, and live like a queen."

This was precisely the sort of experience that always fixed for the moment my wavering faith in God, and my own immortality. For I could not believe that there was nothing more than "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust," betwixt me and this man, who shamed his own nature, if only as a clod of the valley; and I was forced to feel that the inward quivering of passion that did not move a muscle of my frame lifted me out of my materiality.

The breath of power that swept over me was cold to the mortal touch, as it had ever been. I stood rigidly erect before the man with a sensation of my blood turning to ice; my lips were cold as marble, and moved as heavily, though the words they uttered seemed to be produced by a force within me that struck them out of fire.

"I have heard you to my own shame," I said; "not to yours, because you must have been lost to all shame before you could so address yourself to

one whom you believed to be poor and dependent, and without a free choice. There are no words to express the contempt and scorn in which I hold you. I loathe you and your offer alike. But you have made a mistake, and I must correct you. I am not so unprotected that I am compelled to endure your insolence from day to day. If you are not too shallow to comprehend what is plain enough, or too effeminate to grasp at stubborn realities, you may understand that I am even able to protect myself. You have no right to be here, sir, in the absence of your friends, and I desire you to quit the room and the house."

The door was opened as I spoke, and Mr. and Mrs. Bontoft walked in.

"Bless my life!" exclaimed the latter, "who are *you* ordering out of the room and the house! Well, I declare, I expected something like this!"

"Why—why—why what's the matter, Phipps?" said Mr. Bontoft.

"Oh, I don't know," said Captain Phipps, lazily extending himself upon the sofa, and yawning. "The young lady has been working herself up into an extraordinary fit of heroics, and upon my soul I'm sorry you interrupted the fun. Mrs. Bontoft, if I did not know you had a chawming temper, I should wonder how you managed her."

"Miss Marples," said Mrs. Bontoft, turning

upon me, sharply, "I insist upon your explaining yourself."

"I have nothing to explain," I said, "except that that man has insulted me, and I cannot remain in the same room with him."

"*That man!*" repeated Mrs. Bontoft; "it might be that gentleman, I think, in your mouth!"

I heard no more, for I walked out, and went up stairs to my bed-room. Mechanically I began packing up the few things lying about that belonged to myself. That uncontrollable impulse under which I had acted, whether right or not, told against me in this world; but it was enough that I did not regret it. It was, however, a battle of the weak with the strong, and I knew that I should be discomfited. "Perhaps God is guiding me for the best, in spite of myself," I said. "At all events, it is well that I should return to my grandfather."

It was yet early in the day, and I remained many hours alone, no one coming near me.

Mrs. Bontoft's maid appeared at length, and brought me some tea.

"I hadn't any orders," she said, "but I thought you must be hungry. I'm so sorry you're going."

"It can't be helped," I said.

Sarah lingered in the room, and at length said:

"I think, miss, if you would speak to Captain Phipps he would make it all right again. He's a pleasant gentleman sometimes."

"I cannot do that, Sarah," I said. "You do not understand: say no more about it."

At a later hour I was ordered down stairs. I found Mr. and Mrs. Bontoft and Captain Phipps seated round a table covered with wines, cakes, and various kinds of confections. The Captain was holding a glass of wine to his eye when I entered, and he sipped it leisurely whilst I remained.

"I don't intend to have more words with you than are necessary," said Mrs. Bontoft, "but I think it due to Captain Phipps to let him see that no dependent in this house has our authority for acting impertinently. I don't want *you* to say anything: the Captain has given us his word of honour that his statement is correct, and I am really astonished at your giving yourself such airs. Some people cannot be indulged without forgetting themselves and taking liberties. The Captain has been kind enough to intercede for you, but keeping you here is out of the question."

"Oh dear, no, no!" said Mr. Bontoft; "let her go: we mustn't be made uncomfortable in this

way. Now, Moonface, get rid of it and let us enjoy ourselves."

"I've little further to say," said Mrs. Bontoft, "except that as I have overpaid you already, you must not expect anything more. I suppose that you will not deny that I have paid you one quarter, and the things I have purchased for you amount to more than is due for the quarter upon which you have just entered. So, in fact, I am still giving you a quarter's salary in advance. This must serve in lieu of notice, which I really could not give with the prospect of being annoyed further."

"Oh dear, no!" said Mr. Bontoft: "get rid of nuisances at once."

"Then you will prepare yourself to go to-morrow morning," said Mrs. Bontoft.

I had stood still without speaking a word. To what purpose could I speak? I made an inclination, and was moving towards the door, when Captain Phipps called out:

"Um—aw—just wait a minute. When next you choose to go on stilts and use stwong expwessions, just stop to consider who you're talking about, will you?"

The knowledge that I could not make matters worse by saying anything, did not incline me to

open my mouth. At the moment, I did not feel myself so much in the hands of these people as in the hands of God; and I was rather inclined to say to the Creator, "Why is this iniquity permitted?" than to the creature, "I defy you, I can still defend myself."

I know, what every English man and woman who may read this knows well, that no negro or quadroon in the worst Slave State of America is further removed from the pale of humanity, more really despised and down-trodden, than is poverty in this free and self-righteous land. In making use of me for her own gratification Mrs. Bontoft had not rated me above any other article necessary to her state; I had never received more personal consideration from her than I did at the moment of my abrupt dismissal; and Captain Phipps, though—possessing a mind of extra littleness—he took the trouble to rebuke me, cared no more for my estimate of his "word of honour" than he would have done if I had been a negro or a dog. And if people well to do in the world, people of money and position, will analyse their own feelings and take a retrospect of their own actions from day to day in connection with their readiness to stand by their own class and their inborn abhorrence of poverty in all shapes, they will at once acknowledge my experience to be nothing out of the

way, though they may marvel at my assurance in attempting to bring anything so common-place prominently forward.

I will say nothing about my feelings during that long night, because few would care for them, and those few may never read these pages. I had remaining the little money I brought with me, and this enabled me to pay for the hackney coach that John ordered to the door the next morning. When I gave my address to the coachman—"Brook's Court, Clerkenwell,"—he regarded me with the insolent look that, in England, is called forth even from the poorest by an admission or suspicion of mean circumstances.

"Brook's Court," he repeated; "I never heard on it. Is it anywheres near Clerkenvell Green?" I could not tell him, and after some grumbling he mounted the box, and I was driven away from that abode of elegance and social ease. I did not see either Mr. or Mrs. Bontoft, and I had the comfort of knowing that my departure would give great satisfaction to both these individuals to whose daily enjoyment of life I had proved a slight interruption. I did not seem to have been driven far when the coachman called out to know if I could direct him which way to turn, but I could not, and he got off the box grumbling, and went into a shop to make inquiries. He seemed

to have obtained some clue, for he drove off again, and presently deposited me and my two boxes at the bottom of Brook's Court.

I can't leave them 'osses to carry that ere luggage," he said, as I paid him the fare. "There's plenty as'll do it if you look about." And so saying he mounted to his seat and drove away.

It was a populous neighbourhood, and plenty of people were passing to and fro, but I did not know whom to address. A fat, dissipated-looking woman of about forty, with a string of heavy beads round her neck, and no cap on, strolled down to the end of the court, and stood there with her arms folded.

"Are you in wants of a porter?" she said at length, addressing me.

"I want some one to carry these boxes," I said; "only a little way, to number nine up the court."

"Lauk! Do you live here?"

"My grandfather does."

"Oh, I knows; the old man as is ill. Wait a minute; I'll fetch a cove as 'll do the job if he aint too drunk."

The old man that was ill! My grandfather had been ill, then, and they had not told me. My heart beat thick and fast, and it seemed an age till the woman returned.

"Sam 'll be here presently," she said, on

making her appearance, "an' him an' me can carry 'em between us."

I asked her to take charge of the boxes at once, and hurried up the court. I rushed into the wrong house, and was driven out by a hideous old woman, who called me a "blazing young faggot." I cannot help it if I am compelled to record much that is horrible; I sat down with the intention of giving a faithful narrative of the past as it bore upon my feelings and my destiny.

It is a fact that one shock neutralises another. I found the right house, and walked upstairs quietly. I opened the door of our room, and saw my grandfather stretched upon a mattress on the floor, apparently fast asleep. There was a heaviness about the wan face and attenuated figure that might well be taken for that of death, and I gazed upon him till my heart seemed to stand still. Presently I heard a noise downstairs, and went out and closed the door gently, and waited till the woman and her companion came up with my boxes.

I told them to leave them on the landing, and asked what I had to pay.

"What you like to give," said the woman.

That indefinite mode of compensation is never more tantalising than when you feel that you have little to bestow. I had no smaller coin than a

shilling in my purse; and, as I held one irresolutely in my fingers, the woman called out, "that'll do," taking possession of it as she spoke.

"I go halves," said the man who was with her.

"You be blowed," said the woman; "I'll treat you to three pen'orth, an' that's more nor you deserve; just bundle down."

I waited till they were fairly gone, and then opened the door again. My grandfather was awake, and he uttered my name feebly, and I went to his side, and knelt down and kissed his forehead and his pale lips.

"And so they sent for you, my child," he said. "I told them not, and you see I am now getting well. Yet this surprise is pleasant, too."

I thought the pleasantness would be diminished when he understood that I was once more driven forth and penniless. It was painful to me to give this explanation, though just before I had considered the change for the best. However, I spoke out at once.

"No one sent for me, dear grandfather, and I did not know you were ill, or I should have been here before. Now I will not leave you again. You require a nurse, and I can work while I attend to you. I shall feel happier than I have been while away from you, grandfather."

"I am sorry for this," he said, looking at me wistfully. "If not quite happy, I had the satisfaction of knowing that you were well protected; that you were kept out of the way of the vicious, whose example shocks and withers the feelings if it cannot corrupt them. I had hoped to get out of this place before you returned to me."

Here was my grandfather, like the rest of the world, strong in his belief that nothing vicious or degrading could be found amongst respectable people. His simplicity was a species of weakness to which I felt compelled to minister, for what was the use of distressing him further with details of the iniquity in many forms by which my heart had been shocked and withered, if not corrupted.

I needed to give no further explanation of the abrupt termination of my engagement than was to be found in the natural dying away of the caprice that led to it. I was able to prove that it would have been impossible to save anything out of my salary, and that therefore my remaining would have proved to be no ultimate advantage even to myself. I was addressing myself to an invalid in the last stage of weakness, and I tried to speak as cheerfully and hopefully as possible. And it is astonishing how soon I

began to feel as if I had never been absent from this home, sanctified by the light of affection. Presently Aunt Betsy came in with some medicine. If she, too, was surprised and troubled, she gave little expression to her feelings, and encouraged me in my hope of finding something to do at home.

I learned that my grandfather had been ill more than a month; during which time my aunt had been compelled to attend to him. How they had lived God knows, and I dreaded to ask. I missed nearly all my grandfather's books, as well as several other things that used to lie about. I supposed that they had been sold to procure necessaries, and I did not shrink from looking these worst horrors in the face at once.

My grandfather dozed through half the day, and I sat consulting with Aunt Betsy. She acknowledged that our situation was bad enough; that, having herself been unable to work in consequence of my grandfather's illness, they had been compelled to dispose of the books, and such other things as could be best spared. The great difficulty was paying the rent—six shillings a-week for that miserable place.

"I do hope that your coming home will turn out for the best," said Aunt Betsy. "Whilst your grandfather was at the worst, Jem was a

great help to me; now he is getting better, and if you could procure a little needlework you could attend to him and work at the same time. There's two young girls occupying an attic in this house that get a living by working for the ready-made linen shops. That is," continued Aunt Betsy, feeling it necessary to modify her words, "they contrive to keep soul and body together. I'm an old woman, but I never met with anything like the suffering there is in this overgrown town, Margaret. These two sisters are orphans, quite alone in the world, and they tell me that, work as hard as they will, they can only earn one shilling a-day, finding their own needles and thread! Well, you had better be doing this than nothing. If you like, you shall go up and see them; they are so lonely, poor things! they will be glad of a visit from you."

I felt quite eager to go to them; and as my grandfather slept, Aunt Betsy took me out, closing the door gently behind us. I followed her to the top landing, and she knocked at the door of the back attic. A low voice told us to come in.

CHAPTER VIII.

I BELIEVE my unexpected appearance disconcerted the two girls very much. I was well dressed, which made their own shabbiness more conspicuous; and, perhaps, experience had taught them to look for little sympathy from one of their own age and sex, whose position appeared to be above theirs.

"It's only my niece," said Aunt Betsy; "if you let us see that we disturb you, we shall go away directly."

"Oh, you don't disturb us at all," said the eldest of the girls, who had started up from a table at our entrance, her pale face flushing for an instant. "We have just been getting an early tea, and we are very busy, so you must excuse finding us in this state. Will you sit down, Miss?"

She dusted a chair, and placed it for me. The early tea, I suspected, included the day's dinner. The teapot stood on the hob, and on the table, a small round one, were two cracked mugs, a basin containing some coarse sugar, part of a loaf of bread, some butter, and the remains of a herring.

"I assure you we had quite done," said the girl, in reply to something my aunt said. "Susan was just going to clear away, so don't go on that account. We have set ourselves a task, Mrs. Marples, but I don't know how we shall get on with it. We sat up all last night, and intend to do the same to-night; but Susan stands it better than I do, and I'm afraid I shall be falling asleep; it's a long time to keep awake, you know, and such tiresome work."

"And you won't find it a saving in the end," said Aunt Betsy. "Suppose it makes you both ill now?"

"I tell Susan so," said the girl, "but she has such a spirit! And then we really have need to try something extra. We shall see how we get on."

This elder sister interested me very much. I wished that she would look me full in the face, instead of glancing at me furtively, and dropping her eyes whenever they met mine. As I gazed

at her I could not help thinking that if well dressed, even joyless and in ill-health as she evidently was, she would look better in every respect than any of the gay girls I had seen at Mrs. Brown's. She seemed to be about seventeen or eighteen years old, and without being handsome, her appearance altogether was pleasing. Her soft, bright brown hair was very neatly arranged, and a beautiful set of teeth and a well-formed mouth rendered her smile, sad as it was, very fascinating. The other sister appeared to me quite a child, though I afterwards learned that she was nearly fourteen. Unlike the elder one, she was short and stout, altogether sturdy in appearance and manner, and our presence did not seem to disturb her at all as she busied herself about the room. She was not so pretty as her sister, being slightly marked with the small-pox, and I found that I had attracted her particular notice for some reason, as she rarely took her eyes off me.

"Well, Mary," said Aunt Betsy, "my niece wished to see you, and now I have introduced you to one another. I shall leave you together; for young people get on best by themselves. You must not make a stranger of her; for, thank God, I can feel that her heart is in the right place, or I shouldn't have brought her here. I'll take care

of grandfather," she added, turning to me, "and you may stop as long as you like."

The rapid lifting and dropping again of Mary's heavy eyes seemed to betoken some fear of this arrangement; but Aunt Betsy was gone, and I, who had not yet spoken a word, roused myself for an effort that should break through this embarrassment.

"You must not let me be an interruption," I said; "if you will allow me to help you, I shall feel quite pleased; indeed, it will be conferring a favour upon me, for as I shall have to earn my living in the same way, it is as well to begin practising at once."

Mary lifted her eyes from her work in evident astonishment.

"But you have been well educated," she said; "surely you have no need to turn to such drudgery as ours is."

"Mine has been heavier drudgery," I said; "because I never was so independent as you are; indeed, I have never earned anything that I could do as I liked with, and I should be far worse off than you are if I had not had a home to return to. Come, I have got a thimble; let me help you."

Mary still seemed to hesitate; but Susan came forward eagerly.

"Oh, yes, let her help us! You know how badly I want a new frock; and if we don't work hard, I can't get one. Look here, Miss Marples, you can be sewing that."

I took what was offered me, and commenced in earnest.

"You are very kind," said Mary. "That child has been spoilt. She was a great pet at home, and I have got in the habit of humouring her. She is all that is left to me, too. But you surprise me with what you say about yourself. I have often wished that I had been well educated, that I might have done something better for Susan and myself."

"I have not found a good education of much use to me," I said, "in the way of earning a living. You may understand that, from what I say, I am quite in earnest about trying to get my living as you do."

"It is very grievous," said Mary, in her quiet manner. "There seems to be little that we poor women can turn to with advantage. That makes me so unhappy about Susan."

"And not about yourself?" I thought as I lifted my eyes to look at her. How old experience seemed to have made her, young as she was!

"Sister always talks so odd!" said Susan; "as

if we should be doing this all our lives! I mean to marry, and make my fortune."

Mary lifted her eyes to mine for an instant, and we interchanged a world of experience in the glance. We both pitied this child, who seemed doomed to a more than ordinary disappointment.

"I do admire your dress, Miss Marples," continued Susan, who was very chatty. "I was always so nicely dressed at home, wasn't I, Mary? and now I'm quite ashamed to go out. People stare so when you're ill-dressed."

"For my part," said Mary, "I consider a shabby dress a sort of protection: nobody cares to look at you."

"Now, that's just like her," said Susan;" she would rather not be looked at: isn't that odd?"

I had never been so puzzled by a question. Though my sympathies went mainly with the elder sister, I felt sorry for this poor young thing, troubled about so small a matter as a decent dress. Not so small a matter either, when I came to consider; for I, who had never been so far reduced, could not help feeling how unpalatable such a final declension would be to myself.

"And so, by working hard," I said in reply,

"you hope to get a new frock? Well, I will do my best to help you, and we shall surely manage it amongst us."

And whilst I said this, with an idea that, poor as we were, we might afford to patronise these friendless girls, (the idea of patronizing anybody was very agreeable to me), I brought into review before me sundry dresses that I had outgrown, and that would sell for very little, and that with very slight alteration might be made up for this child. And then I thought of the profusion at Mrs. Bontoft's, and wondered what became of the superfluities of the rich.

Whilst we were busily at work a very chubby-faced child, a boy of about eight years old, opened the door and peeped in, and seeing me, was about to retreat when Mary called out:

"Come in, James; here's a young lady that will be quit glad to see you. He is *such* a darling, Miss Marples!"

I had never seen much of children, and certainly I had never seen a child so beautiful as this one was. Standing for a moment, irresolute whether to advance or retreat, he gave me a full view of his very fair and handsome face; his noble head with its clustering curls of sunny hair; his large, liquid blue eyes and pouting lips;—and

making a sudden dash forward he flung himself headlong into Mary's lap, dragging her work out of her hands.

"I'm not going to stand this any longer," he said: "you all make such a pet of me, and it's nothing but nonsense. I mean to be a soldier."

"Oh, he's a brave boy!" said Mary, holding his head caressingly with both hands: "and you can't think how patriotic he is, Miss Marples."

"England," said the child, raising his round face, and holding out his chubby hand, and elevating his forefinger, "England shall never lie at the proud foot of a conqueror! Didn't we beat the French at Waterloo?"

"We did, love," said Mary, kissing him, and her whole heart seemed to be in the caress—"we did, and we always shall whilst we have such brave fellows as you are."

"Oh, yes! it's all very well talking about brave fellows, and kissing me that way!" said the boy. "I'm not going to stand it, I tell you, so be quiet. Women are so silly!"

He glanced slyly at me out of the corners of his blue eyes as he spoke.

"Well, I never saw such a little Turk," said Susan.

The boy retreated to the end of the room, and stood against the wall with his hands behind him.

"When I'm a man," he said, I mean to march under the 'flag that braved a thousand years the battle and the breeze!' I shall be a soldier or a sailor; I don't know which yet. But I'll let the French see it's true what the song says:—

'Britannia needs no bulwarks,
No towers along the steep;
Her march is o'er the mountain wave,
Her home is on the deep.'

Nobody ever conquered *us*, did they, Mary?"

"No, love."

"Now you were both saying last night, while reading the Bible, that fighting was sinful," said Susan.

"Now you know nothing about it," said the boy, and his baby lip curled with an expression of contempt. "We said it was sinful to quarrel, but not to defend ourselves. You would look very queer if the French came over some fine day and burned all our houses and took us prisoners. We're not going to let them do that, I should think. I've been reading about Nelson, Mary; all about his funeral, you know. Don't you think Nelson went right to heaven?"

"I hope so," said Mary.

"He was so brave!" said the child. "But I should like to be buried as Sir John Moore was."

"Why?"

"I don't know, but I should," said the boy. "I'm always thinking of the dark night, and the silence, and the lantern gleaming, and the soldiers bending over him.

'No useless coffin confined his breast,
Nor in sheet nor in shroud we wound him;
But he lay like a warrior taking his rest,
With his martial cloak around him.'

Wasn't that grand?"

I thought there was a grandeur about the child himself as he stood with flashing eyes, his cheek paling and his lip quivering with emotion.

"He's a strange child," said Mary, lifting her eyes from her work. "He's such a knowledge of things, and he feels so. You should hear him read. James," she continued, speaking in a louder tone, "will you read for us to-day?"

"Yes, to be sure. What shall I read?"

"The History of Joseph."

"Nay," said the boy; "you know, Mary, I never read that well. I always feel a choking in my throat, and then I am obliged to stop, and Susan laughs at me. I'll read something else."

"The parable of the lost sheep, then."

"Now, Mistress Mary clary, quite contrary, you know that's worse still."

"Nay, dear, I like to hear you read that so much: do oblige me; and Miss Marples here wants to hear it."

"Do you?" said the child, turning to me, sharply, and fixing his searching eyes upon me, as if he could not proceed without an assurance that we were not mocking either him or God with our request. His grave, scrutinizing look roused me from my partial indifferenee, so that I even felt ashamed of it.

"I do, indeed," I said; "you will quite please me by reading it."

The boy hesitated no longer; he took a Bible from a cupboard shelf, and seating himself cross-legged upon the floor, placed it upon his knee. Then having found the page, he rested his chin upon one hand, and laid the other upon the open book.

The boy's manner of reading the parable impressed me as I had never been impressed before, with its sublimity, and beauty, and pathos. His full and flexible though childish voice rivetted attention of itself: his emphasis was correct, because he knew and felt what he was reading; and the solemnity of his infant look, and the reverence with which he evidently bent over the

book, were striking evidences of the power of God's word over the simplest of his creatures.

"'And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran—'" Here the boy's voice failed him. His face grew pale, and his lip quivered, and his large eyes were swimming in tears. I, too, felt the choking in my throat; I heard Susan tittering, and felt shocked, and looked at her rebukingly.

"Well, we ought to feel," said the boy, speaking evidently with effort, "when we think that this is what God does to every one of us. To you and me, Susan; and some day we may feel glad to have such a father to turn to. Is it not so, Mary?"

"It is, darling," said Mary. "But you are more like the other son who never left his father."

"Nay, I think not," said the boy. "I think I should not speak as he did: but you shall hear." And he read on to the end, and kept his face bent over the book for several minutes, not liking to let us see how powerfully he was affected.

"You may understand, Miss Marples," said Mary, "why I like to hear James read. He brings out the whole meaning of everything. If one cannot feel oneself, there is no getting rid of

the child's feeling. It sets us thinking that we are ourselves not quite as we ought to be. I am sure it has been so with me."

I could have acknowledged as much myself, though I did not. But I thought—perhaps even now God is calling me back to himself through this child. I called him to me, and bent over him with a full heart.

"You are a sweet boy," I said, "who taught you to read?"

"Papa taught me."

"And who is your papa?"

"The boy looked wistfully at me for a few seconds and then turned to Mary.

"His dear papa is in God's hands," said Mary. "He knows that they shall meet again one day, and be happier than they are now."

I understood from this that his father was dead, and felt grieved that I had put the question.

"Yes," said the boy, "and I mean to do something wonderful to please papa and mamma. I always feel that I shall when I see mamma grieve. You see," he continued, "looking down at his tiny feet and then drawing himself up, "you see I am growing a great boy, and ought soon to be doing something."

"You, poor baby! What can you do?" said Mary.

"Baby!" said the boy, curling his lip again, "that's your nonsense, Mary. I'm *not* a baby. Why, Ellen isn't a baby, and she's two years younger than I am; we don't call Lilly a baby. Babies wear long clothes and people nurse them. Come now! Mr. Smithson says I shall be a man soon, and he'll help me."

"Well, James, you've all the will to do something, and I hope God will help you."

"There, now you talk sense, Mary. Of course God helps everybody. Now, I'll go and see what mamma's doing. You know I don't like to leave her long, because she frets, and then I talk to her. Shall I see you again?" he added, turning back as he was going out and addressing me.

"I hope so, love."

"Where do you live?"

"I live in this house; only just down stairs."

"Do you, though?" he said, his face brightening as he came fairly back to me. "Ah, Mary called you Miss Marples; then you belong to the good old gentleman that used to come up to mamma when she was so ill, months ago? I'm so glad, and I'll tell mamma all about it."

"What a remarkable child he is," I said, as he closed the door behind him. "Does he live in the house?"

"In the next room," said Mary, "with his

mother and two sisters, younger than himself. It's a very sad story. His father was an author, a writer for magazines and newspapers, I think. They lived very decently, somewhere in Islington, till difficulties drove Mr. Graham out of his mind, and then his wife and children came here. I thought her heart was breaking when she first came, eight months ago. I believe a subscription was raised for her; but friends won't do much, and she works hard, poor thing, just as we do, and getting less."

"And where is her husband?" I asked.

"In Bethlehem Hospital. It is a large public institution, and one might think people so afflicted would be treated well in it; but Mrs. Graham says her husband complains of being dreadfully ill-used, and she feels sure that he is. It would grieve you to see her sometimes. I'm sure," continued Mary, suddenly snatching up a corner of her work and putting it to her eyes, "it makes one quite wretched to see what misery there is in the world!"

Yes! Mary was in the right place for seeing it. I sat lost in deep thought during several minutes. This outcast state of existence, upon which I was myself entering, seemed to have many redeeming points about it. My heart had been more interested; my thoughts more elevated during the one

hour I had passed in that poor room than during my more than twelve months' sojourn amongst respectable and world-courted people. Here is the balance of good and evil, I thought. Thou bringest us nearer to thee, O God, by affliction. Here I shall not lose sight of Thee; here I shall better learn to know myself!

I took up the bible which the boy had placed upon the table. On the fly-leaf I found these words written in a small but fair hand:—"From a mother to her fatherless children. May the Lord look upon them when they have no friend left beside Him. Mary Lester." I turned the leaves over hurriedly and then put the book down. This absorbing interest in others was new to me, and I began to feel oppressed by it. I resumed my work which I had only quitted for a moment.

"And you," I said, "how long have you lived here?"

"Nearly three years," said Mary, sighing.

"It will be three years in March since mother died," said Susan. "Father died six months before. And see, Miss Marples, they took everything from us but these few things, and we used to be so well off, didn't we, Mary?"

"My father kept a toy-shop, and was in debt when he died," said Mary. "It was only right, the creditors taking the things, but you may be

sure we found a great change, losing parents and all at once."

"And you had no friends?"

"Not any that would look to us: no!" said Mary, quietly.

How many lie desolate upon earth because those who *should* "look to" them consider their poverty a disgrace? At all events I was not the only one neglected and contemned; in outward circumstances I was not worse off than those who could look back upon a past that brought no blush of shame to their cheeks, no throb of indignation to their hearts.

"But we're not quite without friends," said Susan, tossing her head: "and we don't think to live in this way always. Mr. Smithson comes in to see us very often, and he's a friend of Mrs. Graham's, too."

"Mr. Smithson," said Mary, fixing her eyes with an uneasy expression upon Susan, "is a comic actor at one of the theatres. He was a friend of Mr. Graham's, and I believe it was chiefly through his means that Mrs. Graham got help. I have heard her say so. It was little James that first made him acquainted with us, and he has certainly been very kind in calling to inquire how we got on, and sometimes leaving us and Mrs. Graham a newspaper to read. It

is not his fault that we have no time to read."

"Oh, I always read the newspapers," said Susan.

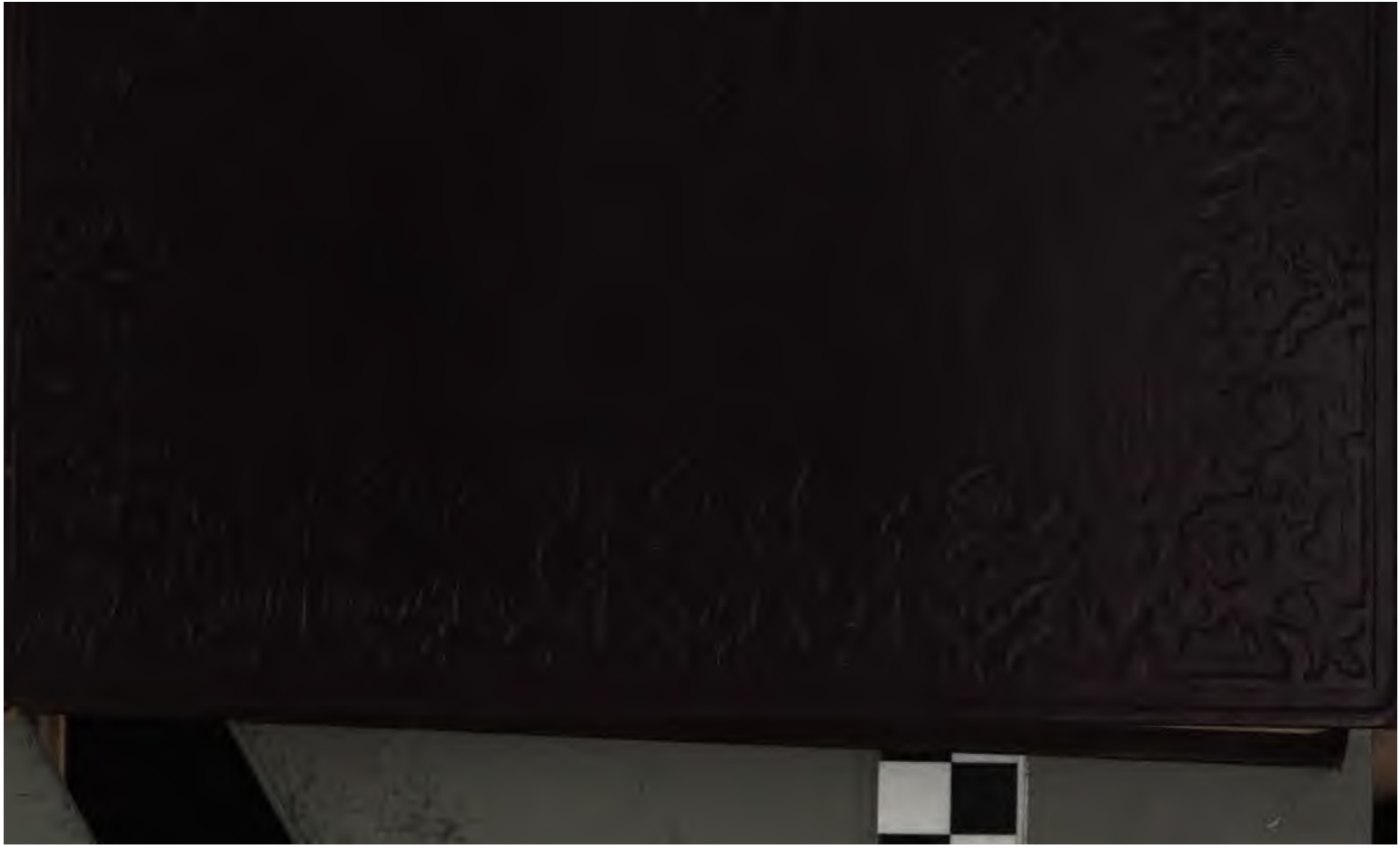
"Our poor parents were very religious," continued Mary, "and they had a great objection to plays. It would have grieved them to know that we had even this slight intimacy with a player. But, Miss Marples, when one is left so lonely in the world it seems only natural to be thankful for a little kindness from whatever source it comes. Besides, I believe Mr. Smithson is really a good-hearted man. I hope he is for Mrs. Graham's sake, for he seems to be the only friend she has."

How soon I had become acquainted with the histories of these people; how readily I had acquired the kind of knowledge that is necessary to a right comprehension of character! Of the Browns, the Wiltons, and the Bontofts, I knew no more than met my eye from day to day. They might have all sprung from the same dunghill, and doubtless they did; and in different ways, but with the same aim, they made a struggle to thrive upon it.

The conclusion of my reflections was, that in one material respect I had profited by being reduced to the society to be found in Brooks' Court. Great depravity and horror there was to be met with, no doubt; but nothing worse than might be found

in the highest circles of society. If there was a happy medium, this surely was it. I must accept it with its drawbacks; and this I was the more inclined to do because deprivation rather than abject dependence seemed to be one of them.

And that night, after obtaining Aunt Betsy's consent to my scheme for providing Susan Lester with a decent dress, and having from my grandfather an assurance that he was better, I slept soundly, and had happy dreams, in which little James Graham figured very conspicuously.

END OF VOL. I.

PRINTED BY HARRISON AND SONS,
LONDON GAZETTE OFFICE, ST. MARTIN'S LANE.